



Toilet Learning



A GUIDE TO INCREASING YOUR CHILD'S INDEPENDENCE

Signs of Readiness

Toileting is a natural part of development. Children exhibit signs of readiness that, if identified in time, can help the whole process go more smoothly.

Children are physically capable of beginning toileting once their sphincter muscles and nervous system are fully developed. This development occurs once the child is able to walk steadily.

Psychologically, a child exhibits many signs of readiness to start the toileting process. This occurs when the child is able to recognize his or her own bodily functions. Seeing others use the toilet can also help a child become ready to start toileting.

The following are some signs that your child may be interested in beginning toileting:

- Shows increased interest in the toilet or bathroom (flushing the toilet, interested in others' bathroom habits, etc.)
- Recognizes that he has urinated or had a bowel movement in his diaper
- Dislikes the feeling of a wet or dirty diaper
- Begins using language to describe urine/stool
- Experiments with bladder control by holding urine (you may notice extended periods of time with a dry diaper)

*Not all children exhibit these signs at the same time or in the same way. In general, we believe that toileting early is much better than waiting too late and missing the child's sensitive period!

Children that toilet too late may demonstrate resistance to toileting because they have grown accustomed to being wet or soiled. It is also more difficult to toilet an older child who is naturally in a stage in which they are seeking power and testing limits.

Preparing the Home

What to Include?

It is important to set up a space for your child to be fully independent in the toileting process.

This should include:

- A toilet seat or potty
- A sink with a step stool
- Toilet paper
- Wipes

- A basket for dirty clothes
- A wardrobe with clean underwear*

*In order to fully experience the feeling of being wet, children who are toileting should not be kept in diapers. Instead, plan to keep a supply of clean underwear and pants. Wearing underwear helps the child connect the sensation of a full bladder with the release of urine. Furthermore, children learn that being clean and dry is preferable to being wet or soiled.

Once you commit to putting your child in underwear, we recommend not using diapers for any reason (with the possible exception of nap or night time). It sends a very confusing message to your child when you tell him that he is capable and ready to start using the toilet, but put him in a diaper for a trip to the grocery store.

Some children may also learn to predict that they will be diapered sporadically throughout the day and hold their urine until they have a diaper on, which can make them more susceptible to urinary tract infections. Padded training underwear can be a useful alternative for outings.

The Emotional Environment

Children have an uncanny ability to sense the attitudes of adults. Thus, it is critical to use positive language and create a comfortable atmosphere around the toileting process. When the adult is relaxed, it is much easier for the child to be successful.

When your child successfully urinates or has a bowel movement in the toilet, you can identify the event: “I can see that you pee in the toilet.” The child does not need any external praise or motivation (e.g. toys or stickers). Rather, they will feel a natural pride in their accomplishment. Avoid using the words, “Good job!” as they may become disappointed if they are unsuccessful.

When we overpraise a child, we teach the child that they should expect an external reward for the behavior. Toileting is a part of a child’s natural development. When we give a child too much praise for using the toilet, this sends the message that they have done something special and that you are surprised by their abilities.

Similarly, if a child is unsuccessful in using the toilet, refrain from using shame or judgment. Instead, simply identify the event without emotion and accept it as part of the process: “I can see you pee on the floor. Let’s clean it up and put on dry underwear.”

Allowing for Independence

Learning to use the toilet is an important step in your child’s development of independence. This leads to a sense of self-pride as the child learns to trust his own abilities.

As your child develops independence, you can support the process through collaboration. Instead of dressing your child, you might offer to help him put his leg in the underwear and then let him pull them up.

This process requires patience and a positive attitude. With continued support, your child will soon learn to dress, undress, and use the toilet without support.

Toileting and Language

Using correct language supports your child's development. The toileting process provides an opportunity for the child to learn the proper names for parts of their body and for their bodily functions.

Providing clear and accurate language frequently also helps your child learn to communicate his need to urinate or have a bowel movement. When we use baby talk, euphemisms, or incorrect language, it trivializes the process.

Life Beyond the Toilet

Although toileting can be an exciting time for the whole family, remember that it is not the defining moment of your child's day. Young children live in the moment. Often any opposition to toileting is because the child views it as a daunting task rather than a small part of their daily routine.

We help children see the life on the other side of using the toilet. Instead of just saying, "It's time to use the toilet," we build it into our routine. We might say, "It's time for lunch! First let's use the toilet and wash our hands!" or "Before you go outside, it is time to use the toilet." This sets the tone that toileting is just a part of the day, not the major event.