

Toilet Learning: A Partnership Between Parents and Providers By Mardi Lucich, MA & **Toilet Training & Toilet Training Readiness** by the American Academy of Pediatrics

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Toilet learning is a major developmental experience that commonly occurs in child care, where providers are often the first to recognize when a child is ready. Many parents turn to providers for their expertise in helping a child learn how to use the toilet because they find that providers' guidance and participation in the toilet learning process is invaluable. When providers and parents work together as partners, toilet learning is a much easier process for everyone.

- The start of toilet learning should always be based on a child's developmental level rather than age or the adult's anxiousness or eagerness to start. For instance, is the child able to imitate? Can the child communicate the need to eliminate? Can the child pull clothes on and off? Attempting toilet learning before a child is ready can create stress and anxiety for the child, and in turn delay the process. Instead, team with parents to help the child get ready and support learning at her or his own pace.
- Toilet learning should begin when the child shows signs of interest and readiness—this is the valuable window of opportunity that providers should help parents identify and respond to. The child needs to be willing and cooperative, not fearful of, or fighting the process. And it is best not to start if there are other changes the child is also experiencing, such as a recent move, new sibling, new child care setting, etc.
- Toilet learning is a multi-step process and setbacks are common, should be expected, and do not necessarily mean failure. Parents should remember that the child is taking a temporary step back to a more comfortable place, which helps to support a natural step towards progress.
- Toilet learning should follow a sequential plan that is consistent both in child care and at home. Make use of normal routines to establish regular potty times, which helps to make toileting a habit.
- Promote toileting skills within the context of helping the child develop self-esteem and independence. Ensure that the learning experience is posi-

tive, natural and non-threatening, so that the child feels confident. Because toilet learning involves discussing, undressing, going, wiping, dressing, flushing and hand washing, reinforce the child's success at each step.

- Include toilet learning activities as part of the daily curriculum. Read stories and sing songs about using the potty, or organize games that reinforce skills associated with toileting.
- Parents should feel welcome and encouraged to talk to their child care provider about any concerns they have about their child's development or problems with toilet learning. If necessary, parents may take their child to visit their health care provider for a physical evaluation and some further information on strategies and techniques.

Toilet Training & Toilet Training Readiness

These books are available to check out from the Child Care Services Resource Library:

Books for Adults:

Toilet Training the Brazelton Way by Joshua Sparrow

American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Toilet Training by Mark Wolraich

Potty Training for Dummies by Diane Stafford & Jennifer Shoquist

Mommy I Have To Go Potty! by Jan Faull

Toilet Learning by Allison Mack

Books for Children:

The Potty Book for Girls by Alyssa Satin Capucilli

No More Diapers! by Joae Graham Brooks

Going to the Potty by Fred Rogers

Please turn over for the other article.

By the American Academy of Pediatrics

Bowel and bladder control is a necessary social skill. Teaching your child to use the toilet takes time, understanding, and patience. The important thing to remember is that you cannot rush your child into using the toilet.

There is no set age at which toilet training should begin. The right time depends on your child's physical and psychological development. Children younger than 12 months have no control over bladder or bowel movements and little control for 6 months or so after that. Between 18 and 24 months, children often start to show signs of being ready, but some children may not be ready until 30 months or older.

Your child must also be emotionally ready. He needs to be willing, not fighting or showing signs of fear. If your child resists strongly, it is best to wait for a while.

Stress in the home may make learning this important new skill more difficult. Sometimes it is a good idea to delay toilet training in the following situations:

- Your family has just moved or will move in the near future.
- You are expecting a baby or you have recently had a new baby.
- There is a major illness, a recent death, or some other family crisis.

However, if your child is learning how to use the toilet without problems, there is no need to stop because of these situations.

It is best to be relaxed about toilet training and avoid becoming upset. Remember that no one can control when and where a child urinates or has a bowel movement except the child. Try to avoid a power struggle. Children at the toilet-training age are becoming aware of their individuality. They look for ways to test their limits. Some children may do this by holding back bowel movements.

Look for any of the following signs that your child is ready:

- Your child stays dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day or is dry after naps.
- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- Facial expressions, posture, or words reveal that your child is about to urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Your child can follow simple instructions.
- Your child can walk to and from the bathroom and help undress.

- Your child seems uncomfortable with soiled diapers and wants to be changed.
- Your child asks to use the toilet or potty chair.
- Your child asks to wear grown-up underwear.

Stooling patterns vary. Some children move their bowels 2 or 3 times a day. Others may go 2 or 3 days between movements. Soft, comfortable stools brought about by a well-balanced diet make training easier for both child and parent. Trying too hard to toilet train your child before she is ready can result in long-term problems with bowel movements.

Talk with your pediatrician if there is a change in the nature of the bowel movements or if your child becomes uncomfortable. Don't use laxatives, suppositories, or enemas unless your pediatrician advises these for your child.

Most children achieve bowel control and daytime urine control by 3 or 4 years of age. Even after your child is able to stay dry during the day, it may take months or years before he achieves the same success at night. Most girls and more than 75% of boys will be able to stay dry at night after age 5.

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