

TOILET TRAINING

Helping children master a major developmental milestone!



CHILD CARE HEALTH PROGRAM
Public Health – Seattle & King County

Toilet Training

A partnership between families and providers

Leaving the world of diapers behind and “graduating” to using the toilet is a major developmental milestone for children. Toilet training is often begun when children are still toddlers. The toddler stage of development is one of transition to greater independence. Using the toilet can be part of that transition.

Toddlers are learning to have self control in many areas. At the same time, they have a strong interest in independence and self-actualization. Though no longer infants, toddlers need to maintain the same strong attachments with caregivers that they had in infancy. But, unlike infants, toddlers are interested in asserting their new found skills. The relationship between a toddler and parent may have different kinds of challenges - challenges around control and self-determination. When you begin the toilet training process it is important to think about how to maintain that positive nurturing attachment that is so important. Keep in mind that toilet training should not be a power struggle that leaves both you and your child feeling upset.

Most children are at least 18 months old when they indicate an interest in using the toilet. Your child’s developmental level will help determine their readiness to learn. To determine if your child is ready to be toilet trained consider the following:

- ❖ Can your child follow simple directions?
- ❖ Can your child sit and play for at least five minutes?
- ❖ Does your child signal (grunts, pulls at diapers, facial expressions, etc.) before a bowel movement or wetting incident?
- ❖ Does your child seem interested in using the toilet (pretending to use the toilet, sits, squats down, etc.)?
- ❖ Are there any major family stressors (moving, new baby) that might interfere with toilet training?

Some suggestions for families

When you decide the time is right to begin toilet training, include your child care program in your plan. There are different recommendations about how to best toilet train your child. These range from training children in 24 hours (see references) to reward systems. You can review the programs available and make a choice about what may be best for your child. Most programs follow guidelines that include:

- ❖ Role modeling. Let your child watch adults/siblings or peers use the toilet.
- ❖ Reading your child's cues about the need to use the toilet and offering encouragement to try when the cues are noticed.
- ❖ Making the toilet feel safe and comfortable. For example, use a potty chair or make sure your child's feet touch the floor or are on a bench.
- ❖ Scheduling times to use the toilet; for example, after lunch.
- ❖ Praising your child when successful.
- ❖ If not successful, reassuring your child about trying again next time.
- ❖ Avoiding "power struggles." It is important to emphasize the positive interactions between parent and child.



Some suggestions for child care providers

Toilet training is a major milestone in a young child's life. Because children spend much of their day in child care, you may recognize signs that a child is ready to begin toilet training. As a provider, you can share your observations with the family and offer suggestions and emotional support. Working together with the family, you can help make toilet training a successful and positive experience for their child.

- ❖ Follow the same procedure in child care as in the home. Use the same words (pee-pee, poop, etc.), so the child does not become confused about what is required. Pretend play with a doll using the same vocabulary and talk through expectations.

- ❖ Develop a detailed written plan of communication between the child care program and the family. Keep daily records of successes and concerns to share with the family.
- ❖ Encourage the family to dress the child in easily removable clothing. Keep an extra set of clothing on hand for accidents.
- ❖ Develop routines that encourage toilet use. Watch for those non-verbal signs that suggest a child has to use the toilet. Suggest bathroom visits at set times of the day, before going out to play, after lunch, etc.
- ❖ Expect relapses and treat them matter-of-factly. Praise the child's successes, stay calm, and remember that this is a learning experience leading to independent behavior.
- ❖ The noise made by flushing a toilet may frighten some children. Try to flush after the child has left until they become accustomed to the noise.
- ❖ Take time to offer help to the child who may need assistance in wiping, etc.

Be patient and supportive

Children are interested in pleasing the important adults in their lives. If toilet training becomes stressful and interferes with maintaining a consistently warm and positive relationship, it may be best to let the child know they can try again at another time. Don't be discouraged or disappointed. Allow your child the time they need to master this important developmental milestone.



Sample letter to families beginning toilet training:

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN!

Toilet training is an important stage in your child's development. Our teachers want to work with you to help your child be successful. Here are some tips we have found to help with toilet training:

- ❖ Once you start, plan to continue until successful. Do not give up too easily.
- ❖ Build up to the event. Tell your child they are going to **stop using diapers**. Let them pick out special underwear. They will not want to get "Bob the Builder" or "Barbie" wet. Start using the underwear continuously during the day.
- ❖ Set a timer. Remind your child to use the potty every 1/2 hour to an hour. This gives your child practice going into the bathroom, pulling down their pants, and sitting on the potty, even if nothing happens.
- ❖ Celebrate when something does happen - cheer, clap, and sing a song. Your child just did something amazing!
- ❖ Try to stay close to home for a few days so accidents are not a big inconvenience. Children need to feel successful, not embarrassed.
- ❖ Stay in pull-ups for bedtime. It takes quite a while for some children to stay dry at night.
- ❖ Do not punish your child for accidents. Accidents will happen. Your child will notice how uncomfortable wet underwear makes them feel and will learn to "go potty."
- ❖ You probably will be cleaning up a lot of accidents. This is normal. You will be rewarded eventually with a successful and proud toilet trained child.
- ❖ It will happen. Be patient and supportive.

Please call with any questions.

-Adapted from a letter to parents written by Kristina Steffen,
Encompass, North Bend, Washington

When to seek help

In general, girls are ready to learn at a slightly earlier age than boys. Children may learn bowel control before they learn bladder control. It can take a while before a child stays dry both during the day and at night. If you are concerned about how toilet training is progressing, your Public Health Nurse is available to offer help and support. Families might also check with their health care provider for advice.



REFERENCES:

Azrin, Nathan, Ph.D. and Richard M. Foxx, Ph.D. 1976. *Toilet Training in Less Than A Day*. New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster.

Wolraich, Mark L., MD, FAAP and Sherill Tippins. 2003. *American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Toilet Training*. New York: Bantam Books.

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