

## Toilet learning

*Toilet learning is a big step for both children and adults. Changing diapers all day is a lot of work, and families may find that diapers become very expensive. Although the adults are ready to take that big step, the key is the child's readiness. Toilet learning can take a lot longer when a child is pushed into it, and often involves tears and frustration on both the child's and the adult's side.*

Make copies and share this tips page with the parents of toddlers. It's important that caregivers, parents, and families agree on how to work with the child if toilet learning is to progress.

### When is a child ready?

When the time is right, toilet learning can go quickly and easily. Look for these signs that a child may be ready:

- Understands and follows simple directions.
- Stays dry for at least two hours at a time during the day.
- Stays dry through nap time.
- Seems to know when she's urinating or having a bowel movement.
- Wants to be clean and dry.
- Seems interested in the toilet or potty chair.
- Tries to pull her pants up and down.



Children will often begin to show some of the signs of being ready between the ages of two and three years old. Remember that each child is different. Many bright, normal, healthy three-year-olds may not be ready to learn to use the toilet. They may be more interested in learning to climb, run, jump, and talk at this time. Don't push! Wait three to six months and try again to see if the child is ready.

### Working with parents

Toilet learning will go a lot easier if you work with the parents as a team. Decide together if and when the child is ready to begin learning to use the toilet and the ways you're going to work with him.

Talk with parents about what is happening with their family. If

there are major changes, such as a new baby on the way, moving to a new house, etc., you may want to wait to begin toilet learning until everyone can focus on it. Keeping the same routine for about three to four weeks during this time is helpful.

Remind parents that toilet learning comes one step at a time. It often takes several months after learning daytime control for children to learn to control their bladders at night.

Children will use the toilet when they are ready.

## Getting Started

- **Begin by showing children what they are to do in the bathroom.** Toddlers like to do the same things that others do. If you have mixed ages of children in your care, the toddler may want to see the other children using the toilet. Talk with her about using the toilet. Let her get used to the toilet with a special child's seat or potty chair. She may want to sit on it with her clothes on.
- **Read children's books to the child about using the potty.** Check the library and online for book titles. Reading a book together helps the child understand what will happen as she uses the toilet and that other children learn to do this too.
- **Teach children words for familiar body parts, urine, and bowel movements.** Talk with parents and agree to use the same words with the child. Talk with the child about "peeing" or "pooping" (using the words you and the parents have chosen). Do not use words like "dirty" or "yucky" to talk about this natural process. When you change the child's diaper say to him, "You pooped. Let's get you cleaned up. It feels good to be clean and dry."
- **Talk with the parents about dressing their child in clothing that's easy to pull up and down.** Avoid zippers, belts, and buttons – pants with elastic all around the waist are easier for young hands! Some adults begin the toilet learning with diapers then switch the child to pull-ups or training pants when the child is using the toilet several times each day, depending on what seems to work best with the child.
- **Take the child to use the potty chair about 45 minutes after meals and snacks, after waking from a nap, and other times when the child seems ready.** Stay with the child as she sits on the potty. Read a book, sing some songs, or talk with her to pass the time.
- **Limit the time on the potty chair to 4 – 5 minutes.** If the child is successful, give hugs and praise. If the child isn't successful, thank her for trying and tell her, "Maybe next time the 'pee' will come out." Don't be surprised if a child urinates or has a bowel movement right after trying on the potty chair. It takes time to learn this new skill.



## Expect Accidents

There will be accidents...even after a child has been using the toilet a number of times each day. Treat accidents calmly. Say to the child, "Accidents happen. I know you're trying hard to learn to use the toilet. Next time we'll have to stop playing sooner to get to the bathroom on time." If accidents take place for more than a week, talk with the parents to see if there are changes at home or the child may need to visit a doctor to see if there are medical reasons.