

Suggestions to Facilitate Toilet Learning

Saying goodbye to diapers is an exciting passage for parents and children alike. Methods of supporting children in this endeavor vary among families and cultures, and as in all aspects of parenting, encouragement, and patience foster success.

Assess Your Child's Readiness

By waiting until a child is developmentally ready, we protect him, and us, from undo stress. If your child is in group care, teachers and parents should partner to assess a child's readiness to learn to use the toilet. Here are some developmental signs of readiness:

- Being able to control muscles that regulate elimination
- Being able to connect the impulse to eliminate with the act of elimination
- Pulling pants up and down independently
- Having words to say they want to use the toilet
- Staying dry for long periods of time, or telling you he has gone to the bathroom in his diaper, and talking about toileting

Assess Your Readiness

Once you start the process it's important to take your child to the bathroom whenever he says he needs to go. A few questions to ask yourself:

- Have we conferenced with my child's teacher, so that we can discuss and develop a plan?
- Can we dedicate a couple of days to stay close to home to start the process?
- Is our family facing a major change, such as moving to a new home or the birth of a baby?
- Are we prepared to wash additional loads of laundry? Do we have paper towels and cleaning products available?
- Have we determined which words we will use for urination and bowel movements?
- Will we use a toilet insert or a small potty-chair; or will I show him how to hold on to the toilet? Some families chose to use a potty-chair at home, but since for sanitary reasons they are not used in child care centers, it's usually advisable to help your child learn to use a regular toilet.
- Am I going to teach my son to stand to urinate, or sit down? How will we help him reach the toilet? Do we have an easily cleanable stable stool? Or will we try another method?

Prepare your child

Talk with your child about learning to use the toilet. By the nature of the act, the child needs to be part of this decision and process. If she is not interested, she probably isn't ready. Suggestions to prepare your child for toilet learning:

- Spark motivation by talking and reading books about using the toilet.
- Create a toileting routine that becomes part of your everyday schedule, just like brushing teeth or getting ready for a nap. When you find that your child's diaper is dry after a nap, start the routine of heading to the bathroom as soon as your child wakes up.
- Explain the routine. Teach her the words to use to talk about bowel movements and urination.
- Role-play sitting on the toilet, flushing the toilet, washing and then drying hands.
- Talk about classmates and other children who use the toilet.
- Plan a date with your child to go shopping for underwear. Take photographs and maybe go for ice cream during this celebratory outing.
- Dress your child in clothes that are easy to remove, for example, use pants with elastic or Velcro rather than overalls, buttons, and zippers.

Tips to facilitate toilet learning

Applaud the effort. Have children sit on the toilet for a few minutes every few hours. If nothing comes out, say, "I'm so glad you tried! You can try again later." Be a cheerleader and enthusiastic. "I'm glad you are trying," is an encouraging statement when they attempt but don't actually go. "Good for you!" complements the child's ownership of the act, when they have a successful trip.

Keep a basket of books in the bathroom. Reading is very relaxing. Also some children have so much fun reading they forget they're sitting on the toilet.

Be playful. Children are more apt to want to do something that is enjoyable. You might make up songs (interject your child's name), hop to the bathroom like bunnies, or play I-Spy.

Accept that at times children have accidents or regress; it can be two steps forward, one step backward. Smile and remember that development is a journey. Be assured, the age at which your child learns to use the toilet does not reflect on your parenting ability or your child's intelligence. When feeling frustrated remember that ultimately children learn to use a toilet, and this stage will be yet a distant memory.