



TOILETING IS AN IMPORTANT SKILL FOR DAILY LIFE that has many social implications. In order for the child to achieve this important milestone, children and families need to establish a clear toileting routine. This will ensure a child has success in school and in social situations.

The following tips are from pediatric occupational therapy practitioners who have experience with educating parents on establishing toileting routines.

If you want to:

Identify signs when the child is ready to begin participating in a toileting routine.

Consider these activity tips:

Children will often demonstrate signs when they are ready to be toilet trained. These signs include:

- Interest in the bathroom or in the toileting process, which includes wanting to visit the bathroom, playing pretend toileting, touching toilet paper, or being curious about how the toilet flushes
- Wanting to observe others using the bathroom
- Reporting to a caregiver when they have gone in a diaper and/or asking to wear underwear
- Starting to “hold” their urine or bowel movement and/or getting upset when a diaper is soiled

It is important that families begin toilet training when it works for them and the child, typically between 18 months and 3 years of age. Toilet training is a family commitment, so all members should collaborate for success.

Set up a successful routine for potty time.

An important aspect of toileting is for children to learn their body and the cues it is giving them to know when to go to the bathroom. But families should also encourage toileting routines, including the following times during the day for bathroom visits:

- When waking up
- Before and after naptime
- Before and after a new play activity
- Before a meal
- Before bedtime
- Before leaving the house for an event

Consistently taking a child to the bathroom at established times helps identify a routine for the family and child. If a child is showing signs of needing to go to the bathroom by wiggling or grabbing his or her clothes, families can ask if it’s time to visit the bathroom. But it is also important to teach children to recognize their body signals and go on their own.

Increase independence in toileting skills.

Part of successful toileting is to ensure children wear clothes that can be easily removed. This often means clothing with elastic waistbands. If a child has a difficult time grasping the waistband, families may attach a loop the child can pull on.

If you want to:

Consider these activity tips:

Provide a comfortable and inviting environment.

The bathroom can be a scary place with lots of noises, sensations, and smells. Some strategies for setting up a good toileting routine include making the space accessible and inviting, including:

- Placing items needed for toileting, such as toilet paper, within easy reach, and having a sturdy stool nearby to help the child get onto the toilet.
- Allowing the child to do an activity while on the toilet, like reading a favorite book.
- Talking to the child about the bathroom and how the toilet works to avoid fear.
- Placing brightly colored towels and fun-smelling soaps at the sink to make handwashing fun.
- Addressing smells with air fresheners as appropriate.
- Adapting the toilet seat so the child feels secure. For example, consider using a potty chair, potty ring, or foot rest.

Offer steps to help your family learn a positive routine.

Learning to toilet may take time, and it is important not to rush a child. Children may need to sit for a bit to be successful. They may benefit from:

- Running the sink water to initiate pottyng
- Singing a song or two to relax
- Looking at a book while on the toilet

If a child cannot remember all the steps in the process of toileting, a series of pictures of each step posted by the toilet may help. Remember, children need to practice, and toileting has a lot of steps! Bathrooms are also different, so a child may need additional time when in a new bathroom.

Help your child learn proper hygiene.

Some children may need assistance getting clean after toileting. They may need coaching on how much toilet paper to use, and visual checks to ensure that they are clean. Handwashing is important, and children should be able to access the sink with a sturdy stool. Soap and towels should be easy to reach. In order to protect children from water burns, families can label the faucets with colors to indicate which is cold and which is hot.

Encourage positive behavior.

Toileting accidents are a part of the learning process and to be expected. Children may be so interested in something else that they forget about getting to the bathroom until it's too late. A child should never be punished for an accident. Instead, praise a child when successful and clean up accidents calmly. If necessary, carry extra clothes so children won't be embarrassed if they have an accident. Consider plastic sheets on the bed as a temporary measure and reduce fluids before bedtime. Children can also help clean up the mess, which may help them learn to avoid future accidents.

Reward children for their responsibility and participation as they learn toileting skills by complimenting their "big boy" or "big girl" underpants, and by praising their successes in keeping their bed and clothes dry.

Need More Information?

You can find additional information through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org/consumers.

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Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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