

Working in Partnership With Families

Family members and you are likely to have strong feelings about, and perhaps different strategies for, toilet learning. For example, some people think that teaching a child to use the toilet means that the adult should take responsibility for getting the child to the bathroom at the right time. With this in mind, they may begin toilet learning when children are as young as 6 months. Others think that learning to use the toilet should begin when a child is ready to assume responsibility for his or her own use, typically around 30 months of age.

Here are some strategies to help you work with families on diapering and toileting.

Complete the *Individual Care Plan—Family Information Form* (see the *Appendix*) when families enter the program. It includes questions about the type of diapers the family uses, how often the child's diaper is changed at home, times that the child usually needs a diaper change, and any special instructions for diapering.

Ask parents whether and how they are helping their child learn to use the toilet at home. Listen carefully and try to understand families' perspectives when they do things differently from you. Ask questions to help you understand their approaches.

Discuss the signs that indicate that a child is ready for toilet learning. Share with families the steps you take to help a child learn to use the toilet. Offer this information at a meeting or workshop for families whose children are starting to use the toilet.

Help families be realistic in their expectations for toilet learning. Remind them that accidents are inevitable and should be treated matter-of-factly. Explain that even children who use the toilet successfully during the day may need to wear diapers at night for a time or may regress temporarily in response to stress. Explain that girls often achieve success sooner because they can more easily control urination. Finally, remind families that each child is different.

Offer resources to families who may be confused or overwhelmed by toilet learning practices. Display books and articles. Encourage family members to share their experiences with each other.

Negotiate differences between your approaches, if necessary. Things do not have to be done exactly the same at home as in child care, but children need to know what to expect. For example, a child may wear diapers in your program, even though he goes without diapers during weekend days at home. His parents assume responsibility for getting him to the toilet at the right time at home, but you might not be able to do so in your group setting.

SHARING THOUGHTS ABOUT DIAPERING AND TOILETING

Dear Families:

If your child's diaper is changed six times a day for 2 1/2 years, he or she will have had a diaper change more than 5,400 times. Anything experienced 5,400 times is an important part of your child's life—and of yours. Over time, your child will become physically, cognitively, and emotionally ready to begin using the toilet. We will celebrate this milestone together!

While diapering may not be your favorite task, it can be a special time for you and your child. It offers a chance to focus all of your attention on your child. You can talk together, sing, or play a game of “Where are your toes?” When you approach diapering as an opportunity to spend time with your baby, rather than as an unpleasant task to hurry through, you teach your child an important lesson: that bodily functions are a normal, healthy part of everyday life.

How We Can Work Together

- **Let's share information about diapering and toileting.** Tell us how you approach diapering at home. How often do you change your baby's diaper? How do you know that the diaper needs to be changed? Are there any special instructions for diaper changes? Here, we keep track of when we change your child's diapers every day. Be sure to take a look at our daily log and let us know if you have any questions.
- **Please make sure that we have changes of clothing so we can keep your child clean and dry.** Don't be surprised or upset when we send home soiled clothing in a tightly closed plastic bag. Germs can be spread easily during diaper changing, and experts tell us not to rinse soiled clothing at the center. This procedure helps keep your child healthy.
- **Let's talk about approaches to helping children learn to use the toilet.** We'll look together for the signs that your child is ready to learn to use the toilet. We'll also talk regularly about your child's progress. Then we can then decide together about ways to support your child and resolve any differences we may have.
- **Remember that toileting accidents are normal.** Learning to use the toilet takes time. Even children who can use the toilet successfully sometimes have toileting accidents. Having realistic expectations allows us to respond to toileting accidents matter-of-factly. We have some great books that you can read to your child about going to the toilet. *Everyone Poops*, by Taro Gomi, is sure to become a family favorite!

By keeping a sense of perspective and a sense of humor, we can give your child the time and support needed to learn to use the toilet.

Sincerely,

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