AAP Bright Futures National Center
Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents

Promoting Developmentally Appropriate Toilet Training

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We have nothing to disclose

Note: The recommendations in this presentation/training do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.


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Pre-test

Evaluate your knowledge about the topic before the mini training. Please click on the pre-test link below.

Please click on link to be routed to the pre-test

Note: This is for learning purposes only and is NOT approved for CME.
Objectives

- To identify psychological readiness and motor skills needed to start toilet training
- To provide age and developmentally appropriate toilet training anticipatory guidance
- To model and teach positive parenting skills related to toilet training
Role of Pediatric Health Care Professionals: Toilet Training

- Children need to learn to toilet independently
- Increased risk for abuse during toilet training period\(^1\)
- Pediatric health care professional role:
  - Help parents recognize developmental readiness for toilet training
  - Provide realistic expectations for toilet training
  - Encourage positive parenting during the process
Equity

• Family context impacts a family’s approach to toilet training
  • Family changes can impact toilet training
    o New child, recent move, parental employment change, parental separation
  • Family socioeconomic considerations
    o Cost of diapers, access to potty-chair
  • Culture
    o Families from some cultures may encourage earlier age of initiation of toilet training\(^2,3\)
  • Societal factors
    o School pressures to graduate to next daycare / preschool level
    o Toilet training requirement for enrollment in daycare / preschool

• Keep in mind how your own experiences/limited experience, or unconscious bias can impact your guidance.
Common Questions from Parents:
How do I toilet train my child?

• When is my child ready?
• How do I toilet train my child?
• How long will it take?
• What should I expect?
Factors Associated with Delayed Age of Completion of Toilet Training

- Constipation
- Stool toileting refusal
- History of UTI
- Tendency toward later toilet training with disposable diaper use
Child Factors Impacting Toilet Training

Development delays, autism spectrum disorder, and down syndrome/trisomy 21 can also be associated with later age of completed toilet training. It may take longer to achieve the skills needed for successful toilet training. For more information, refer to the identified references.

- Development Delays\(^7\)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder\(^7\)
- Trisomy 21\(^8\)
Case Study

The patient is an 18-month-old seeing you in clinic for a well-child visit

Parental concerns on Previsit Questionnaire:
Difficulty with toilet training
Carefully Review Parent Report of Developmental Milestones on the Previsit Questionnaire

**YOUR GROWING AND DEVELOPING CHILD**

Do you have specific concerns about your child’s development, learning, or behavior? □ No  □ Yes, describe:

- Toilet training

Check off each of the tasks that your child is able to do.

- [ ] Engage with others for play.
- [ ] Help dress and undress himself.
- [X] Point to pictures in a book.
- [X] Point to an interesting object to draw your attention to it.
- [X] Turn and look at an adult if something new happens.
- [ ] Begin to scoop with a spoon.
- [ ] Use words to ask for help.
- [X] Identify at least 2 body parts.
- [ ] Name at least 5 familiar objects, such as ball or milk.
- [X] Walk up with 2 feet per step with his hand held.
- [X] Sit in a small chair.
- [ ] Carry a toy while walking.
- [ ] Scribble spontaneously.
- [X] Throw a small ball a few feet while standing.
Which of the following developmental milestones should be attained PRIOR to initiating toilet training?

- Developmental milestones achieved:
  - Point to pictures in a book
  - Point to an interesting object to draw your attention to it
  - Turn and look at an adult if something new happens
  - Identify at least 2 body parts
  - Name at least 5 familiar objects
  - Walk up with two feet per step with her hand held
  - Sit in a small chair
  - Throw a small ball a few feet while standing

- Developmental milestones NOT yet achieved
  - Help dress and undress herself
  - Engage with others for play
  - Begin to scoop with a spoon
  - Use words to ask for help
  - Carry a toy while walking
  - Scribble spontaneously
Highlighted developmental milestones should be attained PRIOR to initiating toilet training

• Developmental milestones achieved:
  • Point to pictures in a book
  • Point to an interesting object to draw your attention to it
  • Turn and look at an adult if something new happens
  • Identify at least 2 body parts
  • Name at least 5 familiar objects
  • Walk up with two feet per step with her hand held
  • **Sits in a small chair**
  • Throw a small ball a few feet while standing

• Developmental milestones **NOT** yet achieved
  • **Help dress and undress herself**
  • Engage with others for play
  • Begin to scoop with a spoon
  • **Use words to ask for help**
  • Carry a toy while walking
  • Scribble spontaneously
After reviewing the Previsit Questionnaire, what additional questions would you ask to determine if she is ready to start toilet training?
Additional Questions

• Have you thought about toilet training? What are your plans for it?
  o Parents started toilet training one month ago

• How is the toilet training progressing?
  o Parent frustrated: frequent accidents
    • Time-out when she has accidents
  o Not telling her parents when she needs to urinate or have a bowel movement

• Is anyone urging you to start toilet training?
  o She will move up a level in daycare once toilet trained (daycare less expensive at higher levels)
  o Extended family asking why she is not yet toilet trained

• Does she have a dry diaper for 2 hours at a time and know the difference between wet and dry?
  o Not yet

• Can she pull her own pants down and back up?
  o Not yet
Which factors indicate that children are ready to start toilet training?
A. Age: 18 months
B. She tells her parents when she is going to have a bowel movement
C. Daycare tells family she is ready
D. Able to follow simple directions
E. Wants to learn
F. She can pull her own diaper and pants down
G. Her friend is completely toilet trained
H. She has a dry diaper x 2 hours
I. She can say 10 words
Self-Assessment

Which factors indicate that children are ready to start toilet training?
A. Age: 18 months
B. She tells her parents when she is going to have a bowel movement
C. Daycare tells family she is ready
D. Able to follow simple directions
E. Wants to learn
F. She can pull her own diaper and pants down
G. Rachel’s friend is completely toilet trained
H. She has a dry diaper x 2 hours
I. She can say 10 words
Now that you have assessed your patient’s developmental milestones and toilet training readiness, it is time to counsel your family. I like to start with highlighting the positives.

- It is great that she can identify body parts, sit in a small chair and throw a ball. It seems that she might not be quite ready to start toilet training yet. I’d like to share some signs that she might be ready to start toilet training with you so you can watch out for these.
- When she is able to pull her own pants down and back up, knows the difference between wet and dry, has a dry diaper x 2 hours, is able to follow simple commands, and tells you when she is going to have a bowel movement- she will likely be ready to start toilet training at that time.
- In the meantime, it is important to encourage her when she tells you she has a bowel movement or when she makes steps toward toilet training and avoid punishments.

Click the icon to hear narrated guidance.
How Would You Counsel This Family?

• She has not met appropriate milestones to start toilet training yet

• This is a great time to provide anticipatory guidance around toilet training
  o Important to provide early guidance to prevent conflict between parent and child
  o Discuss how to know when your child is ready for toilet training
  o Share Bright Futures toilet training resources
Refer to Bright Futures Guidelines, 4th Edition
Toilet Training Resources

Promoting Healthy Development

Early Childhood Visits

18 Month Visit

Recognizing Signs of Toilet Training Readiness and Parental Expectations

Toilet training is part of developmentally appropriate learning. Many parents need guidance about when to begin toilet training. The average age for a child to be toilet trained during the day is approximately 2½ years.

Sample Questions
Have you thought about toilet training? What are your plans for it? Is anyone urging you to toilet train your child?

Anticipatory Guidance
- Wait to start toilet training until your toddler is dry for periods of about 2 hours, knows the difference between wet and dry, can pull his pants up and down, wants to learn, and can indicate when he is about to have a bowel movement.
- It is helpful to begin training when the appropriate skills and bowel control have been achieved and select "big kid" or "grown-up" training pants.

Techniques
Toilet training is part of developmentally appropriate learning. Each child progresses through toilet training differently and parents need to understand signs of readiness and how to support and encourage their child during this process. Explain that many children do not achieve even partial toilet training before the age of 3 years or complete daytime dryness until the age of 4 years.

Explore family attitudes about toilet training, including parental experiences and expectations.

Sample Question
How is your child’s toilet training progressing?

Anticipatory Guidance
- Encourage toilet training when your child is dry for about 2 hours, knows the difference between wet and dry, can pull her pants up and down, wants to learn, and can tell you when she is about to have a bowel movement. Do not pressure or punish, and avoid friction. Be supportive, give your child an active role, and keep the learning process fun. Praise or reward child for cooperation and success.
- Here are some ways to help your child be successful. Make sure she has easy access to a potty chair, dress her in easy-to-remove pants, establish a daily routine to place her on the potty every few hours, get underwear as a special present for reinforcement, and provide a relaxed environment by reading or singing songs while she is on the potty.
- Children use the toilet more frequently than adults, often up to 10 times a day. Plan for frequent toilet breaks when traveling with your child, even if you are out for a short time.

2 Year Visit

Discipline, Behavioral Guidance, and Teaching
Discipline is one tool parents can use to help modify and structure a child’s behavior. It encompasses positive reinforcement of admired behavior (e.g., praise for picking up toys) and negative reinforcement of undesirable behavior (e.g., a time-out for fighting with a sibling). The eventual incorporation of a functional sense of discipline that reinforces social norms is critical to the child’s development. Although often thought of in negative terms, positive discipline helps a child fit into the daily family schedule and makes childhood and child rearing pleasant and fun. In fact, the Latin root for discipline means “to teach.”

Family structure, values, beliefs, and cultural background influence approaches to behavioral guidance and teaching. Health care professionals should discuss with the parents how they are disciplined, how that discipline made them feel, and the most and least effective methods of discipline. In all families and cultures, discipline is a process whereby caregivers and other family members ensure the child’s safety, establish a sense of order, and promote the child’s healthy development.

Socialization
When provided the opportunity, toddlers and preschoolers acquire socialization skills and the ability to appropriately interact with other children and adults. Social interaction in early childhood promotes comfort and competence with relationships later in life. The social competencies are developmental assets and therefore should be encouraged in children of these ages. Social competencies include planning and decision-making with others, positive and appropriate interpersonal interactions, exposure to other cultures and ethnicities, behavioral resistance to inappropriate or dangerous behavior, and peaceful conflict resolution. Young toddlers will observe these behaviors in others, and preschoolers will begin to practice them. Toddlers also are inclined to internalize positive or negative attitudes toward themselves and others. Children note differences between groups of people (e.g., they express understanding of racial identity as early as 3 years of age), but they do not ascribe a value; they learn that from the adults in their environments. Opportunities for social interaction can be encouraged in the home with visitors, in playgroups, in faith-based organizations, and in public places, such as the park or early care and education programs.

Toilet Training
For a child to successfully toilet train, he must have the cognitive capacity to respond to social cues and the neurologic ability to respond to bowel and bladder signals. Parents often want advice about when and how to toilet train a child. The first discussion about toilet training is best introduced at around the 18 Month Visit. Such early counseling can prevent harmful battles between the parents who might be focused on early toilet training and the child who’s not yet physically or cognitively ready. In-depth discussion usually begins at the 2 Year Visit. The health care professional should explore the parents’ thoughts about this task and provide guidance to fill in the gaps.

Control of urination and bowel movements is a major step forward in developmental integrity. Successful completion of this task is a source of pride and respect for the child and the parents. Daytime control usually is achieved before nighttime dryness. Bed-wetting (nocturnal enuresis) is a common disorder with many possible therapies. It is more common in boys and deep sleepers. Bed-wetting should be discussed with the child and family and investigations considered if the child continues to wet the bed after age 7 years, if bed-wetting results in problems within the family, or if infection or anatomic abnormalities are suspected. Fortunately, with time, most children with bed-wetting develop nighttime urination control. Bowel control is usually completely achieved by age 3 years.

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BRIGHT FUTURES HANDBOUT ➤ PARENT
18 MONTH VISIT
Here are some suggestions from Bright Futures experts that may be of value to your family.

YOUR CHILD’S BEHAVIOR
- Expect your child to cling to you in new situations or be anxious around strangers.
- Play with your child even if by doing things she loves.
- Be consistent in discipline and setting limits for your child.
- Prepare for different situations and try things that can make them easier.
- Take care of your day and your child’s energy and mood.
- Wait until your child is ready for toilet training. Signs of being ready for toilet training include:
  - Staying dry for 2 hours.
  - Knowing if she is wet or dry.
  - Can pull pants down and up.
  - Wanting to learn.
- Can tell you if she is going to have a bowel movement.
- Read books about toilet training with your child.
- Place toilet seat up after use.
- If your child is unwilling to use the potty or toilet, you can read stories about being a big brother or sister.
- Recognize what your child is able to do. Don’t ask her to do things she is not ready to do at this age.

TALKING AND HEARING
- Read and sing to your child often.
- Talk about and describe pictures in books.
- Use simple words with your child.
- Suggest words that describe emotions to help your child learn the language of feelings.
- Ask your child simple questions, offer praise for answers, and explain simply.
- Use simple, clear words to tell your child what you want him to do.

HEALTHY EATING
- Offer your child a variety of healthy foods and snacks, especially vegetables, fruits, and lean protein.
- Give one bigger meal and a few smaller snacks or meals each day.
- Let your child decide how much to eat.
- Give your child 16 to 24 oz of milk each day.
- Know that you don’t need to give your child juice. If you do, don’t give more than 4 oz or a day of 100% juice and serve it with meals.
- Give your toddler many chances to try a new food. Allow her to touch and pet new food in her mouth so she can learn about them.

YOUR CHILD AND TV
- Do activities with your child such as reading, playing games, and singing.
- Be active together as a family. Make sure your child is active at home, in child care, and with sitters.
- If you choose to introduce media now:
  - Choose high-quality programs and apps.
  - Use them together.
  - Limit viewing to 1 hour or less each day.
  - Avoid using TV, tablets, or smartphones to keep your child busy.
  - Be aware of how much media you use.
Indicators of Toilet Training Readiness

- Dry for 2 hours at a time
- Knows the difference between wet and dry
- Able to pull pants down and back up
- Wants to learn
- Notifies parents when she is going to have a bowel movement
Setting Your Child Up for Success

- Take child to bathroom with appropriate-sex parent if one is in family, or with older sibling to learn routine
- Praise attempts to sit on potty or toilet, initially with clothes on
- Allow easy access to a potty chair
- Wear easy-to-remove pants
- Establish a routine of placing on toilet every few hours
  - Not only asking child if they need to use toilet, but having child sit on toilet
- Relaxed environment
  - Reading book or singing on toilet
- Read stories about toilet training
- Give underwear as special present for success
Positive Parenting Suggestions

• Supportive environment
• Avoid punishments
• Make learning toilet training fun
• Praise or reward when child cooperates and has success
• If you see a parent doing something great, point it out
Special Considerations

• Tips for boys:
  • Start learning sitting down
  • Once standing, make it fun!
    Aim at a fun object in toilet bowl

• Children usually learn urine before stool

• Typically, dry during the day before at night

• Nighttime training often is a separate process
  • Some children continue to have nighttime wetness through 7 years^{10}
Case Follow-Up

• Your patient’s parents delayed toilet training

• Once she displayed signs of toilet training readiness
  o Toilet training was less stressful for the family
  o Used positive parenting strategies
  o Followed anticipatory guidance advice
  o Toilet trained at 2.5 years
  o Moved up a level in her pre-school

Note: Average age of achieving toilet training (daytime) in US: 37 months⁴
Post-test

Test your knowledge about the topic and review feedback on your response.
Please complete the post-test (link below).

Please click on link to be routed to the post-test

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## Clinical Resources

- *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children and Adolescents, 4th Edition*
- *Bright Futures Tool and Resource Kit, 2nd Edition*
- *American Family Physician: Toilet Training: Common Questions and Answers*
- *Canadian Medical Association Journal: Toilet Training Children: When to Start and How to Train*
- *Pediatrics in Review: Toilet Training*
Family Resources

- Bright Futures Guidelines - Well-Child Visits: Parent and Patient Education

- HealthyChildren.org: Toilet Training

- HealthyChildren.org: Creating a Toilet Training Plan
References