A RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES IN CENTRAL INDIANA

Toileting Supports for Children with Special Needs
"Understanding your child's unique needs plays a key role in toilet learning."

Along with learning to feed and dress oneself, learning to use the toilet is an important step in personal independence for all children. All parents wonder when to begin the toileting process and how to make the big jump into underwear. For parents of children with special needs, those same questions and worries might be amplified. For all children, the basic signs and steps are the same—just ways in which toileting is approached that differ.

The good news? Children with special needs can overcome any challenges they might face and gain toileting mastery in the process. These tips and strategies can assist you in this process.

It is more important to keep your child's developmental level, not his chronological age, in mind when you are considering starting toilet training. The first step is deciding if your child is ready to begin the process!

What’s included in this guide:

- Preparing for the Process
- Readiness Signs
- Developing a Plan
- The Toileting Process
- Tips & Tricks
- Visual Supports
- Resources & Links
- Sample Forms

About Child Care Answers

Since 1985, Child Care Answers has been a go-to resource for all things child care: an advisor, a collaborator, a guide, and—most importantly—a hand to hold. Our goal is to create seamless experiences for you, working together to minimize any unnecessary hoops.
How Can I Prepare?
Starting the toileting process

Toileting Diary
Keep a “toileting diary” for up to two weeks that will capture information about the timing of your child’s urination or bowel movements each day. This will provide you with clues about appropriate times to take your child to the toilet.

Practice
Provide opportunities for your child to observe another person using the toilet to model undressing, sitting on the toilet, wiping, washing hands, etc.

Choose Your Toileting Language
Select the specific words you will use consistently (e.g., pee and poop). Choose words you will feel comfortable hearing your child use in public and when he or she is older and words that can be used consistently across care settings.

Set Up the Environment
Set up the environment to promote success—which may include purchasing a potty chair or adapted seat for the regular toilet, removing distractions, purchasing training pants, and/or selecting rewards to provide your child for specific toileting behaviors.

Other Factors to Consider
- Language development & their ability to understand and express themselves
- Transition and routine changes, including how they typically adjust to new situations
- Sensory needs, including the sounds, feelings, and textures involved in toileting
- Physical needs & development, including sensing the need to go

Toileting Readiness

When it comes to potty training, and when to begin the process, patience is usually rewarded!

Remember that readiness to begin toilet training really depends on the individual child. Children with special needs and/or developmental delays may not fall within the typical timelines for guidance about toilet training, but most children will learn to use the toilet before they go off to Kindergarten.

Even if your child is not yet showing all of these signs, there are parts of the toilet training process you can begin to help prepare your child. Praise the readiness indicators your child is already exhibiting, like showing interest in toileting, and create goals around those that are not present yet. Work on each goal individually as you and your child grow together towards readiness and toileting independence.

Readiness Signs for All Children

- Notices when diaper or clothing is wet or soiled
- Shows interest in self-care (e.g., dressing, hand-washing, toileting)
- Shows interest in other’s toileting behavior
- Stays dry about 2 hours at a time
- Has bowel movements that follow a regular and predictable pattern
- Has the balance to sit on toilet 2 – 5 minutes
- Follows a few simple directions (e.g., sit down)
- Indicates need to go through facial expressions, postures, gestures, pictures, or words

Parental Readiness Matters, Too!

- Prioritize Toileting
  Make toileting a high priority. Prepare yourself and create a plan. Since you will be guiding this process, your readiness is also important!

- Be Consistent
  Respond consistently and use the same or similar approaches in all settings, including ensuring all of your child’s caregivers are using a similar approach

- Set Aside Time
  Set aside adequate time to commit to toileting. If your time and focus are elsewhere, it likely isn’t the right time to begin.

Developing a Toileting Plan

Toilet training can be challenging for parents and children, but especially so if the child has a developmental disability. Unique circumstances and characteristics of a particular child come into play. Developing a toilet training plan should be considered for each child, based on their individual needs.

When developing this plan, experts recommend consideration of the following factors:

**Developmental Age**  
Consider a child’s developmental age rather than chronological age, with most children understanding toileting between the developmental ages of three to five years.

**Temperament**  
Take into consideration how your child approaches new situations, transitions from activity to activity, how they deal with frustrations, their need for control, etc.

**Medical Needs**  
Are there any medical needs that may impede toileting? If so, talk with your doctor and any specialists before starting the process.

**Communication**  
You know your child best and the ways in which they communicate. Assessing how your child communicates is important as you plan for the words, signs, and pictures/visuals you might use for toileting.

**Sensory Needs**  
Your child’s sensory needs play a large role in toileting, whether it is a need for a fidget, a fear of flushing or loud sounds, the inability to sense the need to go, etc. Consider your child’s own sensory diet and needs when creating your plan.

**Collaboration**  
Having everyone who cares for your child on board and following the same plan creates consistency for your child. Share your toileting plan with your child’s entire team!

The Toileting Process

There are many steps to the toilet training process. The more ready the child is when you begin, the more quickly the toilet training process will go. Read books, sing songs, and make toileting part of everyday conversations. Initial success relies on your child understanding the use of the toilet, not mastering the process!

1. **Build your child's familiarity with the bathroom.** Let your child observe, touch, and get comfortable with the toilet and any visuals you have created before attempting to use it.

2. **Practice sitting on the toilet fully clothed** as part of your daily routine. Allow your child to leave the potty at any time and never force them to sit.

After your child is comfortable sitting on the potty with clothes on, **practice sitting without clothes**, ideally at each diaper change.

3. **Build your child's comfort with the sounds of the bathroom.** Toss the stool from your child's diaper into the potty - Let your child flush and make a big deal about saying "bye-bye" to their poop.

4. **Reward every step of the journey** depending on your child's level of comfort. This may mean rewarding your child for just sitting or practicing flushing.

5. **Ditch the diapers.** When your child has had success in all areas of toileting and dressing/undressing, ditch the diapers and move right into underwear.

6. **Schedule trips or send your child to the toilet regularly,** using the information in your toileting diary to identify the best times to take your child to the toilet (usually every 30 minutes to every two hours).

Using Visuals to Support Toileting

A visual schedule is a display of what is going to happen throughout the day or during an activity.

A visual schedule is a display of what is going to happen throughout the day or during an activity. A visual schedule is helpful during toilet trips to decrease anxiety and difficulty with transitions by clearly letting your child know when certain activities will occur.

To the right are links to pictures that you can print and use while creating a visual schedule for your child. Some children do well with universal visuals while others prefer real pictures of their actual environment. You know your child best, so choose the visuals that will support your child’s ability and preference.

Printable cards and visuals

- **Do2Learn Toileting Picture Cards**
  DO2LEARN.COM
  Pull from a variety of toileting visuals to create your own picture schedule or sequencing cards specific to your family needs.

- **Autism Speaks Toileting Guide**
  AUTISMSPEAKS.ORG
  Loaded with tips, tricks, and resources, the toileting guide created by Autism Speaks contains visuals that are complete and ready to print.

Visual schedule examples

Toileting Tips and Tricks

- Plan clothing for ease of dressing and undressing.
- Use a timer to communicate how long to sit and increase length of time as needed.
- Use social stories that describe each step of the process through a simple story format.
- Create a “first-then” board (for example, “First sit, then bubbles”—as a reward). Remember to provide rewards for the behaviors you want your child to do during the toileting process!
- Assemble basket of preferred toys child is only permitted to use while sitting on the toilet.
- Make the bathroom a positive place (music, soft lighting, pleasant scents, etc.) and decrease things about the bathroom that may be seen as negative or anxiety-provoking for your child.
- Increase liquids and high fiber foods to increase the chances of “catching” your child when they need to use the bathroom.
- Decrease discomfort or fear of sitting on toilet by providing foot rests for stabilization and/or a padded toilet seat insert.
- Create a picture card to communicate the need to use the bathroom if your child is nonverbal or has a hard time using his/her verbal abilities in stressful situations.

Web-Based Parenting Resources

**American Academy of Pediatrics**
Powered by pediatricians, healthychildren.org contains both general information on toileting your child with special needs as well as disability specific tips and information.

**Vanderbilt Kennedy Center**
Evidence-based instructional practices--strategies shown by science to be effective ways to teach toileting to children with Autism and other disabilities.

**Center for Excellence in Disabilities**
The Specialized Family Care Program, located with the WVU Center for Excellence in Disabilities, developed a toolkit for supporting toileting in children with a variety of developmental and medical needs.

Books and Printable Stories

**Toileting Social Stories**
Powered by pediatricians, HealthyChildren.org is contains both general information on toileting your child with special needs as well as disability specific tips and information.

**Children’s Book List**
Ten of the best children's books related to toileting, reviewed by Line Up The Books.

**Autism Speaks Toileting Guide**
Loaded with tips, tricks, and resources, the toileting guide created by Autism Speaks contains visuals that are complete and ready to print.

Apps and Digital Tools

**Touch Autism Apps**
Toileting social stories & much more!

**Top Apps for Kids**
- Daniel Tiger Stop & Go Right Away
- Potty Time with Elmo
- AvaKid See Me Go Potty
DISABILITY SPECIFIC

Resources and Links

**Autism**

- Autism Speaks Toileting Guide for Parents [AUTISMSPEAKS.ORG]
- National Autistic Society Toileting Guide [AUTISM.ORG.UK]
- Toilet Training Children with ASD [RAISINGCHILDREN.NET.AU/AUTISM]

**Cerebral Palsy**

- Cerebral Palsy Guidance: Toilet Training Tips [CEREBRALPALSYGUIDANCE.COM]
- Toilet Training Children with Cerebral Palsy [CPFAMILYNETWORK.ORG]

**Deaf, Blind & Hard of Hearing**

- Toilet Training, Blind or Visually Impaired [FAMILYCONNECT.ORG]
- Raising Deaf Kids, Toilet Training [RAISINGDEAKIDS.ORG]
- Toilet Training Children with Deafblindness [WWW.TSBVI.EDU]

**Down Syndrome**

- Toilet Training Children with Down Syndrome [NDSS.ORG/RESOURCES]
- Toilet Training Children with Down Syndrome [DSAGC.COM/RESOURCES1]

**Multiple Disabilities**

- Toileting Concepts for a Child with Special Needs [RIFTON.COM]
- Using Prompts to Improve Toilet Training [CDN.RIFTON.COM]
- Toilet Training When Your Child Has Multiple Disabilities [FAMILYCONNECT.ORG]
Toilet Training Planning Document

Child’s Name: ________________________________ Age: _______

Goal

The goal is to have Tommy visit the restroom 15 minutes after meals & drinks and sit on the toilet for 5 seconds.

Routine

How often? Tommy goes to the restroom 15 minutes after every meal and drink.

What behaviors and for how long?

Tommy visits the restroom for 5 seconds. He sits on the toilet.

Language

"Now we go to the bathroom"; "Pee-Pee" = urinate.

Setting | Environment

Parent stands outside the door. Door is open. Lights and fan on.

Tools | Modifications

Tommy reads Where the Wild Things Are in the bathroom.

Rewards

Tommy receives 1 m&m every visit to the bathroom.
Toileting Checklist: A Classroom Conversation Tool

Child's Name: ____________________________  Age: ____________

Use this tool to track your child's readiness signs. Once you check off most or all of the readiness signs, use this alongside the toileting plan to guide your conversations with your child's teachers.

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What words or gestures does your family use for body parts, urine, and bowel movements? What strategies have you already tried at home?

Does your child's disability effect toilet learning? If so, how? Please indicate any modifications that need to be made in order to help your child be successful.

What goals do you and/or the therapists have for your child around toileting?
Child Care Answers
Family Support Services

Child Care Answers is a child care resource and referral program. We serve families, child care providers, and the community as we work to enhance access to, and the quality of, child care services in Central Indiana.

At Child Care Answers, we’ve made searching for child care easier than ever!

We can help you get started down the road to making this important decision. As you move through the decision process, we offer support to help you understand what factors to consider when choosing quality child care, preschool, and school-age care.

Connect with one of our Family Specialists today!

We will provide a list of child care programs in your area and answer any questions you might have. Just fill out our Family Information Form to get started, by clicking the link or scanning the code below!

How We Help Families Like Yours

- Free one-on-one support for families needing financial assistance
- Free list of child care, school age, or summer care programs that meet your family’s specific needs
- Information on Indiana child care laws and regulations & education on choosing a quality program

CONTACT
317.636.5727
childcareanswers.org

HOURS
Monday - Friday
8:00 am - 5:00 pm