



THE TOILETING PROCESS



A GUIDE TO INCREASING YOUR
CHILD'S INDEPENDENCE

MONTESSORI TOILET LEARNING

Toilet training, in the Montessori approach, is not just about teaching children how to use the bathroom—it's about helping them become independent, aware of their bodies, and respectful of the natural rhythms of life. In the Montessori method, toilet training is seen as a natural developmental process that respects the child's timing, fosters independence, and supports emotional growth. It is an empowering experience for children, helping them gain a sense of pride, dignity, and autonomy as they master this important life skill.

This handbook will guide you through the key principles of Montessori toilet training and provide practical steps to support your child's journey.

SIGNS OF READINESS

It's important to remember that not all children show the same signs of readiness for toilet training at the same time, or in the same way. In the Montessori approach, we believe that starting the process earlier, when the child shows signs of readiness, is far more effective than waiting too long and missing the child's sensitive period for learning.

When toilet training is delayed, children may become resistant, as they have grown accustomed to being wet or soiled, making it harder for them to transition to using the toilet. Additionally, older children may be in a developmental stage where they are testing limits and asserting their independence, which can further complicate the process. By recognizing the signs of readiness early and responding in a supportive way, you can help your child approach toilet training with confidence and success.

Physical Readiness:

- The child is able to walk steadily and control their sphincter muscles.
- The child stays dry for longer periods of time (e.g., during naps or for extended periods in the day).
- They are able to pull their pants up and down independently.

Emotional and Cognitive Readiness:

- The child shows curiosity about others using the toilet.
- They can recognize when they have soiled their diaper or made a mess.
- The child may begin using words for urination or bowel movements.
- The child expresses discomfort with being wet or dirty.
- They may experiment with bladder control, holding urine for longer periods or asking to use the toilet.

PREPARING AN ENVIRONMENT

A Montessori bathroom environment should be designed to support the child's independence and comfort. The environment should be safe, accessible, and equipped with the tools your child needs to feel empowered during this process.

Key Elements of a Montessori-Friendly Toileting Environment:

- **Child-Sized Toilet Seat or Potty Chair:**
 - A potty chair or an insert on the adult toilet that allows the child to sit comfortably and with their feet flat on the floor.
- **Step Stool:**
 - A step stool for the child to reach the sink independently, to wash their hands after using the toilet.
- **Underwear and Extra Clothes:**
 - Have plenty of clean underwear and comfortable clothing that the child can manage themselves, where the child can access them independently.
 - Avoid diapers once you begin the process, as the child needs to experience the sensation of wetness to understand the connection between the feeling and using the toilet. Wearing underwear helps the child connect the sensation of a full bladder with the release of urine.
 - Make sure a hamper or basket is available for soiled clothes in reach of the child
- **Toilet Paper/ Wipes:**
 - Place everything the child needs (toilet paper, wipes, etc.) within easy reach

THE EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In the Montessori approach, we believe that toilet training is a process that should be free of pressure or negativity. The child should feel supported, respected, and empowered throughout the experience.

Here are some key principles to keep in mind:

- **Keep a Positive Attitude:**
 - Children have an uncanny ability to sense the attitudes of adults. Thus, it is critical to use positive language and create a comfortable atmosphere around the toileting process. When the adult is relaxed, it is much easier for the child to be successful.
 - If an accident happens, say calm and offer gentle encouragement. Avoid negative reactions, as this can create anxiety around the process. Simply acknowledge the accident: "I can see you urinated on the floor. Let's clean it up and put on dry underwear!"

- **Use Positive Language**

- Use neutral language to describe what the child is doing. For example, say, "You went pee in the toilet," or "Let's clean up the accident together." This helps the child focus on the process rather than the outcome and removes any shame or judgment.

- **Avoid Praise or Rewards**

- In a Montessori approach, we believe that external praise and rewards (e.g., stickers or treats) can interfere with intrinsic motivation. Toilet training is part of the child's natural development, and the child should feel proud of their own accomplishments without needing external validation.

- **Encourage the Independence**

- Allow the child to take responsibility for their toileting needs as much as possible. Encourage them to pull their pants up and down, flush the toilet, and wash their hands independently. Offer help only when needed.

- **Be Patient:**

- Toilet training is a process. Avoid rushing, and understand that accidents are a natural part of learning. Focus on consistency and support rather than perfection.

- **Dress for Success:**

- Choose clothes that are easy for the child to remove and put back on independently. This promotes a sense of autonomy and allows the child to feel in control of their own body.

- **Use Accurate and Clear Language**

- Avoid euphemisms and encourage children to use proper anatomical terms. Use terms like "urine," "stool," and "toilet."

BUILDING THE ROUTINE: INTEGRATING TOILETING INTO DAILY LIFE

Toilet training should be integrated into the daily rhythm of the child's day, so it feels like a natural part of life. In Montessori, the environment should support the child's autonomy and routines.

- **Establish a Routine:**

- Encourage the child to use the toilet at regular intervals, such as after waking up, before meals, and before bedtime. This helps the child become familiar with the timing of their own bodily functions.

- **Use Transitions to Encourage Toileting:**

- Children often get "stuck" in the moment and find it difficult to see beyond the task at hand, especially when faced with something they don't enjoy, like using the toilet. In these moments, they may resist because they can't visualize what happens next or understand the bigger picture. To help avoid power struggles, try framing toileting as just another part of the natural flow of the day. For example, instead of saying, "It's time to use the toilet," you could say, "Before we go outside, let's use the toilet," or "It's time to clean up for lunch—first, let's use the toilet and wash our hands." By focusing on what happens next, like playing outside or eating lunch, you help the child understand that toileting is just a small step toward a more enjoyable activity, making it easier for them to cooperate.

- **Stay Calm and Patient:**

- Children often take time to fully master toilet training. There may be accidents, and there may be days when your child resists. Remain calm, patient, and consistent. The goal is not to rush the child but to allow them to progress at their own pace.

TOILETING OUT AND ABOUT

Consistency is key! It sets a confusing message when you put a child in underwear at home but a diaper or pull up to go to the park. When toileting outside home or school, having the right tools is crucial:

- Padded underwear or even pull on cloth swim diapers can be used when out and about to avoid large messes
- Some children dislike being held over adult toilets; fold-up toilet seats can be used for public restrooms
- If going to a park or camping, etc. you can bring a small potty in the car
- Diapers over underwear can be used for long car rides so that the child still experiences wetness
- Don't be afraid to introduce your toileting child to all kinds of situations (public restrooms, port-a-potties, etc.)- toileting is not something that ONLY happens in a controlled environment. Just be sure to bring spare clothes!

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

Toileting is a gradual process, and each child's journey is unique. Factors like consistency, routine, and the adult's attitude play a role in how long the process takes, but the most significant factor is the child's own temperament. Just like learning to ride a bike, where some children may master balancing first, others may focus on pedaling or steering, each

child follows their own path to becoming fully toilet trained. One child may first learn to control their bladder, while another might focus on dressing and undressing independently.

Claims like "diaper-free in 3 days" are often oversimplified myths designed to sell products or books, as they fail to acknowledge the reality that every child learns at their own pace. Patience and respect for this individual process are key to supporting a child through their toileting journey.

THE TWO STAGES OF TOILETING

A common regression in toileting occurs when a child transitions from the first to the second stage of toilet learning:

- **Stage 1** involves the child learning to eliminate on the toilet with frequent reminders from the adult. The child follows the adult's suggestions and is still relying on external prompts to use the toilet.
- **Stage 2** is when the child begins to recognize the internal cues that they need to use the toilet and chooses to go on their own. At this stage, the child no longer needs adult reminders and becomes fully independent in toileting.

A regression often happens just before or during this transition. As the child starts to experiment with their independence, they may resist using the toilet or protest when reminded. This is a natural part of the process, as the child is asserting control over their own bodily functions.

It's crucial not to force the child to sit on the toilet during this stage, as it may cause fear or create further resistance. Instead, allow the child to take the lead and guide the process. Keeping it child-led helps build confidence and ensures a smoother transition to full toileting independence.

REGRESSIONS

Why Do Regressions Happen?

- **Changes in Routine:** Big changes like a new sibling, moving, or vacations can disrupt your child's routine, leading to setbacks.
- **Illness or Discomfort:** Physical discomfort from constipation or UTIs can cause a child to resist using the toilet.
- **Developmental Stages:** Toilet training is closely linked to a child's overall development. During times of rapid growth or developmental changes—such as

mastering new skills or transitioning to a new stage of cognitive development—children may temporarily regress in areas where they previously excelled. They may be so focused on new achievements (like walking, talking, or learning new social skills) that toileting skills take a backseat.

- **Seeking Independence:** Around the age of 2, children begin to assert their independence and may start testing boundaries. During this stage, they might push back against adult suggestions or even refuse to use the toilet altogether. This regression is part of their growing need for autonomy. If a child feels pressured to use the toilet before they're ready or if they sense that toileting is being overly emphasized, they may resist as a way of asserting control.
- **Stress or Anxiety:** Emotional stress, like starting school or family changes, can trigger a regression.
- **Clothing Issues:** Difficult-to-remove clothing, especially in winter, can lead to accidents.
- **Growth Spurts:** During rapid growth, children's bodies and cognitive systems are busy adapting to new developments, which can temporarily affect their ability to recognize or respond to bladder signals. Additionally, growth spurts can lead to increased fatigue, discomfort, or distractibility, which may cause a child to have accidents or resist using the toilet.

What to do during a regression:

During a toileting regression, the Montessori approach emphasizes patience, respect for the child's autonomy, and consistency. Instead of reacting with frustration, it's important to maintain a calm and supportive attitude.

Focus on providing a predictable routine and clear, non-pressuring reminders, but allow the child to take the lead in the process.

Offer opportunities for independence, such as letting the child choose their own clothes or try to use the toilet on their own, reinforcing their sense of control and competence.

Avoid forcing the child onto the toilet, as this can create resistance or anxiety. If the regression is linked to external factors like stress or illness, ensure that the environment is calm and nurturing.

By staying patient and gentle, you help the child regain confidence and progress in their own time, respecting their natural developmental pace.