



Diapering & Toileting





Focus on You: Looking Back and Moving Ahead with Your Child

Say you change your baby eight times a day. In his first year of life, you will have given him a new diaper 2,920 times! Let’s say your 2 ½-year-old who is learning to use the potty has two accidents a day before he gets it. Anything you do together this often deserves thought and attention.

To be honest, diapers and soiled clothing can be smelly and messy. Sometimes, you will hurry as fast as you can to get your child into fresh and clean clothes.

But, the rest of the time, diapering and toilet learning are opportunities to teach your child that his body and what it produces is natural and healthy and there are new words to learn. Most of all, diapering and toilet learning are a way to deepen your relationship by working with him as a partner while he develops the body awareness and control that he needs to be a successful toilet-user.



How do you feel about diapering and toileting?

How you feel about diapering and helping your child learn to use the toilet was likely shaped by what your adults said and did when you were little. Looking at your feelings can help you move forward with your child today.



Take a Moment: A Look at Your Feelings

How do you feel about changing your baby's diaper? Or helping your child learn to use the toilet?

How old do you feel a child should be to starting using the potty?

How do you feel about having your toddler or two come into the bathroom with you when you are using the toilet?



Partnering with Your Child



Think of you and your child as partners.

It is natural to feel you are in charge, and, in many ways, you are. But, when it comes to going to the bathroom, it is up to your baby or toddler as to when and where he is going to go to the bathroom. Your job is to support him as he gains awareness and control of his body.



Look for how he does his part.

For example, does he lift his tiny bottom so you can slide his diaper under him? Does he have a sign to tell you he needs to use the potty like tugging on his pants or saying “pee-pep”?



Choose your words.

What words does your family use for parts of the body? For body products? If you are comfortable talking with your child, he will sense this and be comfortable too.



Be aware of how much is involved in toilet learning.

Here are some of the skills that your child needs to learn when mastering toileting: knowing you need to go, stopping play, going to the bathroom, turning on the light, pulling down your pants, getting onto the toilet or potty seat, getting toilet paper (not too much, not too little), wiping yourself, flushing, pulling up your pants, and washing and drying your hands.



Provide what he needs for success.

Show him what happens in the bathroom, read children’s books about using the potty, find a potty chair he likes, tell him that *things happen*, show patience, and use your sense of humor.



Take a Moment: Being Partners

What does your child do to partner with you around diapering or toilet learning?

What partnering skills do you think he will work on next?



Think of Diapering and Toileting as Learning Times

Besides learning about his body and using the potty, diapering and toileting are a chance for your child to learn:



New vocabulary words.

Use interesting words as you talk about the colors and pictures on his clothing (for example, "That is a magenta humpback whale on your shirt") and what you are doing (for example, "I am dabbing on some diaper cream", "I am sanitizing your changing table").



New concepts or ideas.

These words help define the world, such as up and down, wet and dry, cool and warm, used and fresh.



You keep him safe.

He learns to trust he is safe with you – even when being changed in a high place or the first time sitting on the toilet in a new place.



Things happen and life goes on.

Your matter-of-fact response when he wets his pants teaches him, "No big deal... let's take care of it and keep on moving."

Avoid the Comparing Game

Avoid comparing as much as possible. It is natural to compare what and how your child is doing in regards to toileting to others. Comparing can put unnecessary pressure on you, which ultimately can end up adding stress or tension to your interactions.

Every child learns to use the potty in his own way and at his own pace. Some are happy to try and, if they have accidents, so be it. Others wait – and it can be a long time – until they feel they *have it* and are comfortable letting go of their diapers.

Lots of people like to share advice for toilet learning. Think ahead about what you might say when someone comments about your child or compares your child to others.

If you have a concern, talk to your child's healthcare provider. Ask your questions and pursue them until you have the information you need.



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child's perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Are my partner in toilet learning...	I am capable and competent. Together we can do anything.
Talk about and treat my body and body products with respect...	You value me and my body. Pooping and peeing are natural body functions, and they are not anything to be ashamed or embarrassed about.



Diapering & Toileting from a Child's Point of View



Figuring It Out Together

Here are some of the things your child might tell you about diapering and learning to use the toilet:

Through a Young Child's Eyes			
<i>Diapering and Signs of Readiness for Toilet Learning</i>			
0-4 months		4-6 months	
<p>I am learning the sounds and feels of milk moving from my tummy and out from my body.</p> <hr/> <p>Sometimes my body makes funny noises, and you can help me by holding and burping me and by rubbing my tummy.</p> <hr/> <p>I may be a baby who does not like feeling wet or soiled at all! I cry as soon as I notice it. I may be a baby who does not seem to get upset with a full diaper. You will get to know me and my reactions to wet and messy diapers and then be able to help me.</p> <hr/> <p>One day I will be using the potty. Can you believe it? I will need your support all the way.</p>		<p>The gentle, respectful, safe way that you handle my body tells me that you love me and teaches me about respect. You also help me begin to learn I can count on you to keep me safe and comfortable.</p> <hr/> <p>I want to be a partner. I begin to lift my bottom when you slide my clean diaper under me.</p> <hr/> <p>I learn new words you use to describe what is happening and that talking with you is fun when you tell me about what we are doing together.</p> <hr/> <p>I start to babble and talk back to you, letting you know I'm paying attention, and I want to stay engaged.</p>	
6-12 months			
<p>I look at you and hold out my arms to be picked up when you say, "Time to get changed."</p>	<p>I might cry or kick in frustration when you interrupt my play to pick me up and change my diaper.</p>	<p>I am learning parts of my body. I point to my nose, tummy and belly button when you name them.</p>	<p>I may protest, squirm, and try to roll over when you lay me on my back to change me.</p>



Through a Young Child’s Eyes

Diapering and Signs of Readiness for Toilet Learning

12-18 months

I can carry my clean diaper to you, and, if I’m close to that box of wipes, I may pull out a few to help you!

I may want to continue playing when a diaper change is needed. I can stand and play and still help you change me. It will take some practice and coordination, but we can do it together.

I am very busy. I can be in the bathroom in a flash so be sure toilet locks and cabinets are secured.

18-24 months

I am learning the names of more parts of my body and repeat the new names you tell me.

I can go to the sink and wash my hands (with a little help) after you change me.

I stick out my legs one-by-one as you pull on my pants.

I may start noticing differences and similarities between my body and others – particularly if I have siblings or go to a day care with others my age.

24-36 months

I act out using the potty – with my doll or myself. You can support me and also help me learn about setting my own privacy about my body.

I begin knowing when I have to go or when I have gone to the bathroom. I may pull on my pants. Tell you, “I am wet.” I might hide when I am having a bowel movement.

I love to practice flushing the potty. Again and again. Unless the noise frightens me, in which case, I may ask you to flush.

I can hold my urine longer and can signal to you when I need to pee-pee.

I’m curious. I may follow you into the bathroom and imitate you by sitting on my potty seat and *reading* just like you are doing as you sit on the toilet.

I may be able to stay dry during the day but learning to stay dry at night can take much longer. Sometimes even children in elementary school have nighttime accidents.



Take a Moment: Focus on You and Your Child

What might your child tell you about diapering or learning to use the potty?

How could you respond?



Making Diapering Work for Your Baby and You

Let's make diaper changing time the best it can – for both of us.



Figuring It Out Together

A few basic steps can help make changing time safer, healthier, and easier.

Diapering Basics for a Baby



Choose a safe spot.

There are many flat, clean surfaces that will work just fine. Anything from a changing table to a cleared dresser top or floor can work.



Be prepared.

Have your supplies within easy reach. Warm water and cotton balls (if he has sensitive skin), wipes, diaper rash cream (if needed), a clean diaper, and a little extra patience.



Keep one hand on baby at all times.

Even a newborn can surprise you and roll off a table or the bed.



Wipe from front to back – never from back to front.

You won't spread bacteria that can cause urinary tract infections, especially in little girls, when you follow this rule. Don't forget to get underneath and to clean the creases in those little legs and that sweet bottom.



Place a clean cloth or diaper over your little boy's penis – or get out your umbrella.

Being uncovered, out in the air, often causes baby boys to urinate.



If you find marks on baby's legs or waist, the diapers you are using are too small, or you are closing them too tightly.

Try them a little looser next time, and, if that doesn't work, try the next bigger size. Talk with your home visitor about possible places to get diapers at low or no-cost, like a diaper bank or community-based pantries.



Another idea you want to try?



Diapering Basics for a Toddler On-the-Move



Be prepared.

Have your supplies within easy reach. Wipes, diaper rash cream (if needed), a clean diaper, and a little extra patience. Don't forget a spare set of clothes!



Keep one hand on him at all times.

It only takes a second for him to tumble off the changing table or bed.



Put yourself in his place.

Changing means holding him still—on his back. To understand how difficult this is for baby, try to imagine you want—and need—to move and do, to see and explore an amazing world that has opened up for you. How would you feel if you were asked to stay still in these circumstances?



Change him standing up, if at all possible.

This is an art, but one you can master with practice.



Give him a job.

Ask him to hold his clean diaper or count to five with you as you replace his diaper.



Laugh it up.

Make a silly face. Sing a silly song. Play peek-a-boo.



Make it quick.

Be as quick as you can.



Another idea you want to try?



SAFETY ALERT: It only takes a few seconds for a baby to roll off a changing table or bed and land on the floor. Even a newborn can surprise you with a roll.

Buckle your baby in on his changing table at home and when using public restroom facilities. Keep one hand on him at all times.



To Prevent or Treat Diaper Rash



Change diapers often and right after bowel movements.

Laying or sitting urine and feces will irritate baby's tender bottom.



Clean gently.

Use a cotton ball or clean soft cloth and warm water. Dab gently instead of rubbing back and forth. If necessary, use mild soap. Avoid wipes when baby has a rash because they may burn or irritate his skin.



Diaper ointment.

Check with the baby's healthcare provider to see what will protect your baby's skin and help it heal.



Let your baby go diaper-less – as much as possible.

For example, let him play on a waterproof tablecloth covered with cloth. Or place an absorbent dish drying mat under his sheet in his crib.



Make a plan with other adults.

If your child has diaper rash and is going to child care, make sure his providers know what to use to care for his tender bottom.



Take a Moment: What Others Say

What do family members, friends, or neighbors tell you about diapering and toileting?

Is there anything you've heard that you think will work for you and your child?

Is there any advice you will decide not to act upon?



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child's perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Say to me, "Let's try to change your wet diaper standing up. I know lying still on your back is very hard to do."	My feelings matter, and you understand what they are. You get me.
Give me a job like holding my fresh diaper or new pair of pants...	We are partners. I can do real work to help.



Making Toilet Learning Work for You and Your Child



Figuring It Out Together

Looking at your feelings can help you move forward with your child today.

Check in with You

? How do you feel about the smells and messiness that are a natural part of toilet learning? What can you live with? How can you keep your feelings from making toilet learning a tense experience?

? What is your comfort level with sharing bathroom time? Your child may be curious about what happens in the bathroom and joining you there is one way to find out.

? What can you do ahead of time to reduce stress for you and your child? Be realistic that toilet learning can take a while. Pack extra underpants and clothes for her in your bag.

? What choices can you let your child make? Being a decision-maker gives your child a sense of control and competence. By giving her realistic, genuine choices during toilet learning, you convey the message you are truly partners. Things she might decide include where to put her potty seat in the bathroom, what pants she wants to wear, and does she want to sit on the potty now or in 5 minutes.

? What do you want to show her about her body and using the toilet? She looks to you and is very tuned in to your feelings. What messages do you want your facial expression, words, and actions to say to her?



Signs Your Child is Ready

If your child could tell you in her own words when she is ready to work on toilet learning, she might say, "I am ready when I..."



Stay dry for at least 2 hours or during my nap.



Show you that I know I am urinating or having a bowel movement.

For example, I might tug on my wet diaper or walk away and hide behind the door when I am having a bowel movement.



Show the skills I will need to put together to use the potty.

For example, pull my pants up and down, turn the bathroom light off and on, climb into my potty seat or up onto the toilet with your help, follow your simple instructions.



Follow you into the bathroom and imitate what I see you do.



Ask you to change me as soon as my diaper is wet or soiled.

Tell you I want to wear "big boy underpants" or sit on the potty like you do.

When not to Begin Toilet Learning – or When to Press Pause



Toilet learning will take your attention, time, and patience.

Think about what is happening in your life – at home and work. Can you be there for and with your child? If your answer is yes – go for it!



Times of big changes are not the time to begin toilet learning or can be a time to put plans on pause.

For example, are you moving to a new home? Is your child beginning a new child care program? Are you expecting or welcoming a new baby?



Challenging times can be a time to wait.

For example, if a family member is ill, has recently died, or has lost a job.



Have Realistic Expectations for Success



It will take some time.

At times, you may feel like you take one step forward, two steps back. This is an age of pushes and pulls and intense emotions – for both of you. She may want to be big and little at the same time. You may be pushing for her to use the potty when she isn't so sure herself.



Be matter-of-fact.

This is part of growing up. Everyone learns to use the potty – some sooner, some later.



Be cautious about rewards.

Rewarding your child can add pressure and a feeling of failure when she wets or soils herself.



Think about your words and tone.

Focus on your child's effort rather than on success or failure. "You sat on the potty." Share your enthusiasm and support with your tone and smile. "You are trying hard to remember to stop your play and to go to the bathroom." Avoid words that will shame your child.



Read together.

There are many children's books about learning to use the toilet. For example, *Everybody Poops* by Taro Gomi and *Once Upon a Potty* (a boy and girl version) by Alona Frankel. You may be able to find these and others by taking an outing to your local library. This is a good way to promote toilet learning and love of books and reading.



Be aware – keeping dry at night comes later.

Sometimes staying dry at night does not happen until a child is in elementary school.



Another idea you want to try?



Take a Moment: Learning Something New

Can you remember a time someone supported you as you were learning something new?

What did that person say or do?

How did that support make you feel the next time you faced something new?



Preventing and Responding to Accidents – at Home and Away



Invite your child to use the potty before you go out.

Make it a habit for everyone in the family.



Carry the right stuff.

Things happen. Packing wipes, extra clothes, and a plastic bag will assure you are prepared.



Watch to see how she responds to new or different bathrooms.

Different toilets and loud hand dryers can be upsetting for some children. They may refuse to go. Others are eager to *dive right in* and explore. When possible, time your trips so your child can use the bathroom at home. Bring plenty of hand wipes. Do your best and know she is trying to do her best too.

Keeping Dry at Night



Count on it - this will take time.

It might be until elementary school until she stays dry all night. Boys may take longer than girls.



Wait until she is ready.

You may even want to ask her if she is ready to try staying dry at night, if you notice her pull-ups are dry some mornings.



When you are both ready, let her try sleeping in her underpants.

It can feel like a big step. Using a waterproof mattress cover and having a spare pair of sheets on hand can help you breathe easier.



Stay calm and know she may wet the bed.

Be matter-of-fact as you change her bedding. Things happen. Focus on the positive – the fact that she tried.



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child's perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Avoid shaming me – even if I wet or soil my pants...	You respect me. You are on my team. I will get it with your support.
Give me real choices between two options - sitting on my potty seat or the big toilet; what pants to wear...	I have ideas. You listen to me. I can decide.



Safe Diapering and Toileting

When you keep me safe, I learn I can trust you – and the world.



Figuring It Out Together

Here are some ways to help you keep your child safe during diapering and toileting.



SAFETY ALERT: One Hand on Baby at all Times

It takes only a second for a child – even a newborn – to roll off a changing table or other surface onto a hard floor. Prevent a fall that could change your baby’s life – and yours forever.

Talk Safety with Other Adults Your Child’s Life



Be clear about safety messages.

Talk with any and every adult who takes care of your child – whether at home or in child care – about bathroom safety. Your messages may include, “Never leave my child alone in the bathroom” and “Always secure the toilet lock.”



Share your realistic expectations that toilet learning takes time and that things happen.

Changing diapers and toileting accidents can frustrate even the most kind and loving adults. You can help everyone in your child’s life keep their cool by sharing that learning to use the toilet may take your child time, and you are OK with that.



SAFETY ALERT: Toilet Locks

Prevent splashing and the possibility of drowning with toilet locks. Note: be sure all the older children and adults in your home know how to open them and secure them each time they use the toilet.



Take a Moment: Safety Steps

What steps do you already take to keep diapering and toileting safe for your child?

Is there anything you may want to do differently? Add?



What You Decide to Say and Do Matters

Think about the many ways you support your child. Here are two examples written from a child’s perspective and space for you to add one about your family.

When You...	You Help Me Begin to Learn That...
Tell other adults how to keep me safe...	I can count on you to protect me – even when you are not there.
Choose words that work for you to talk about parts of my body and what it produces...	My body and its products are healthy and natural. I do not have to feel embarrassed or ashamed.

