

Ask a Child Care Adviser: Toilet training

NCAC Child Care Advisers Mamta Bathela and Tanya Tregillgas spoke with Lyndsay Mundy about working in partnership with families to support positive toilet training experiences for children in child care.

Learning to use the toilet is a significant milestone in a child's development. It shows that they can recognise the feeling that they need to use the toilet, and can hold on until they are in the appropriate place. Being able to use the toilet independently also promotes positive self-esteem and is an important aspect of the development of their self-help skills. Maintaining consistency between home and child care makes the process of toilet training easier for the child. Educators play an important role in supporting children through this process and providing families with helpful information.

How do families and educators know when children are ready to learn to use the toilet?

Children generally show clear signs that they are ready to start learning to use the toilet and families should take this as a cue to start the process. When a child has a dry nappy for longer periods of time it indicates that they have some



control over their bladder. Some children may also pull at their nappy when it is wet or come and tell you that they've done a 'wee' or 'poo', showing that they understand what is going on. The important thing is to remind families that all children are different and that they will be ready to learn to use the toilet at different times. If a child is showing these behaviours at child care, tell their family so that they can decide whether to start helping their child to learn to use the toilet.

This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1 and 4.4

QIAS Principles: 1.1, 1.3, 2.1 and 6.4

How can educators work with families to make toilet training successful for the child?

Educators and families should work together to support children when they're learning to use the toilet so the child isn't confused by differing practices. Ask families about what they do at home, and if they do something that you are unable to do at the service, explain this to the family. For example, the family may reward their child with a food treat for successfully using the toilet, but this may not be consistent with the service's nutrition policy. In this case, the educators could arrange with families to either provide a reward that is consistent with the service's policies, or let the family know about successes so that these can be rewarded at home.

What information should be shared between educators and families?

Regular communication between educators and families is important so that ideas and strategies which successfully help the child to learn to use the toilet can be shared. At the beginning of the week check that everything went well over the weekend. Was there anything new that the family tried which was particularly helpful or successful?

It is also useful for educators to let families know at the end of the day about their children's toileting experiences. If there is more than one educator involved in a child's toilet training it is important to maintain consistency in communication, both in the child's training and in communicating to families. Many services have a chart or whiteboard which eases communication between educators and assists families to see how their child did that day. For example, the child sat on the toilet three times in the day and twice they used the toilet successfully. If it was a less successful day, put this into context for the family, and help them to understand that setbacks and less successful days are a normal part of learning to use the toilet.

What other information can educators give to families?

Learning to use the toilet is like learning any skill – it takes time. Each child learns at their own pace and there are often setbacks. Comparisons are often made between children of similar ages. Reassure families that their child will eventually learn to use the toilet.

What positive strategies can be used to assist children when learning to use the toilet?

Patience is the most important tool for families and educators while children are learning to use the toilet, and educators should support families in this. Children should be encouraged for all of their efforts, even if they have a setback or are not entirely successful. For example, a child who has not quite made it in time to use the toilet may be reassured by a comment such as "It's great that you knew you needed to use the toilet. Maybe next time you can let me know straight away so that I can help you get to the toilet a bit more quickly".

Always be positive about toilet training so that your encouragement is reinforced in your language and actions. Going to the toilet is a natural process and not something that children should be embarrassed about. By being positive and approachable, children are more likely to tell you that they need to go to the toilet, allowing you to better support them.

Provide families with information about appropriate clothing to help ensure children are appropriately dressed for learning to use the toilet. For example, overalls can be difficult for children to remove and may cause unnecessary accidents. Children should wear clothes that are easy for them to pull up and down, such as pants with elasticised waist bands.

What policies and procedures can the service have to support toilet training?

Displaying nappy changing and toileting procedures in the toileting and/or nappy changing areas is a requirement of Child Care Quality Assurance. These procedures ensure a consistent approach to toileting and nappy changing between educators so that, for example, everyone knows when to put gloves on and whether gloves need to be changed during the toileting process.

Ensure that the role of the educator is included in the procedure. The National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) publication *Staying Healthy in Child Care* (4th ed., 2005) contains information about toileting which can be used to develop or update policies or procedures.

If the service does not have the facilities to wash wet or soiled clothes in the event of a toileting accident, make sure families understand why this is the case. Provide families with a copy of the service's toileting procedure and show them where the procedures are displayed in the service.

Conclusion

Toilet training is an important part of children's developing independence. Remember that each child is an individual and will learn at their own pace. Learning to use the toilet can be a rewarding experience for children, families and educators when managed positively and sensitively ■

This article relates to EYLF Learning:

- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

References and further reading

- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2005). *Staying healthy in child care: Preventing infectious diseases in child care* (4th ed.). Retrieved 22 July, 2010, from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ch43syn.htm>
- Stonehouse, A. (2008). *Family Day Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #16: Positive toileting and nappy changing*. NSW: NCAC.
- Stonehouse, A. (2008). *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Factsheet #14: Positive toileting and nappy changing*. NSW: NCAC.

Useful websites

- Raising Children Network: www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au