

Ask a Child Care Adviser: Effective toileting and nappy change procedures

Phillip Rowell spoke with Child Care Advisers Tanya Tregillgas and Mamta Bhathela about the importance of having effective toileting and nappy change procedures, and tips for developing these.

In family day care and long day care services, nappy changing and children's toileting procedures are common practice and often a point of discussion between children, families and child care professionals.

Babies and young children need adults to help them manage their toileting needs, and to provide safe and hygienic environments. For example, staff must supervise a child on a change mat, dispose of soiled materials and model correct handwashing techniques.

Effective, written policies, that reflect recommended hygiene, safety and infection control practices, underpin these procedures. They should ensure that nappy changing and toileting are positive experiences which support the individual needs of children, promote their wellbeing, and encourage them to develop their independence. They also guide child care professionals to consistently implement practices which are up to date.

The basic principles which support nappy changing and toileting procedures also apply to outside school hours care services. This is because learning to use the toilet independently of adult help is an important life skill. While the skills required change as a child grows, concepts such as hygiene and safety stay the same. For

This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles:	1.3, 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4
OSHCQA Principles:	5.3, 6.3, 7.2 and 8.3
QIAS Principles:	1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 5.2, 6.3 and 6.4

example, showing a toddler how to wash their hands after using the potty equates to reminding school age children to wash their hands using soap and water after using the toilet.

What should the procedures be communicating?

The main reason for having written toileting and nappy change procedures is to ensure that all adults who work with children at the service have a common understanding of what they are required to do when changing children's nappies or assisting them to use the toilet.

Some services find writing the procedures in a step-by-step format is helpful for adults such as relief staff or parents who may be unaware of the service's nappy changing and toileting procedures. When these procedures are clearly displayed in nappy change areas and bathrooms, adults can easily refer to them so that practices are performed consistently.

The most important component of nappy changing and toileting procedures is to clearly explain the role of adults and the practices they perform. It is helpful to see the adult's role as being able to:

- Support children's toilet learning and growing independence
- Meet children's individual toileting needs, including self-help skills such as undressing and dressing
- Maintain hygiene and safety, including handwashing and use of gloves
- Appropriately supervise children when they are using the toilet
- Recognise when children no longer require adult assistance



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- Talk with children about simple rules of hygiene and appropriate toileting practices
- Manage toileting accidents sensitively when they occur and reassure children.

Where can services get information to help them to develop appropriate toileting procedures?

Procedures for nappy changing can be easily obtained from a recognised authority such as *Staying Healthy in Child Care* (2005)¹. However, finding information about recommended toileting (as opposed to nappy changing) procedures can be a little more challenging.

It is helpful to consider the key details that the service needs to include in their toileting procedure and to then seek information from relevant sources to inform these. For example, a service may need to include information in their procedures about toilet training, handwashing, protecting children's privacy and cleaning the bathroom area. They would then need to seek current information about each of these areas from the relevant authority.

While *Staying Healthy in Child Care* does not provide a step-by-step toileting procedure, it does make recommendations relating to certain practices such as handwashing, the use of gloves, cleaning children after toileting, dealing with faeces and urine, and toilet training, all of which are part of a toileting procedure.

What should be included in a toileting procedure?

When developing a nappy change and toileting procedure, the following questions should be considered. Do the procedures:

- Identify the role of the adult?
- Explain how children are supervised?
- Reflect recommended hygiene and safety practices?
- Promote children's self-help skills and independence?
- Meet children's individual needs?
- Ensure children's privacy and dignity?
- Explain how to manage a toileting accident?

¹ Factsheets are available which reflect the handwashing and nappy change procedures recommended in *Staying Healthy in Child Care* (2005). Services can download the factsheets from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ch43syn.htm>



- Outline the process of disposing of, storing and laundering of wet/soiled materials?
- Incorporate children's home toileting language and/or practices?
- Explain how to clean nappy change and toileting areas?
- Outline the child's role? For example, flushing the toilet, and independently undressing/dressing and handwashing.

The procedures should also describe the interactions which can occur between children and adults during nappy changing and toileting times. For example, during nappy changes adults can sing rhymes, count babies' toes or describe the colours of a mobile.

When toddlers are toileting, adults can discuss concepts of wet and dry, or model to older children the importance of handwashing and other simple rules of hygiene.

Why is communicating with families important?

Services and families need to talk about children's toileting needs so that children begin to feel confident about using the toilet independently.

The following strategies may help services to communicate with families:

- Find out what family practices may influence individual children's nappy changing and toileting such as cultural practices or the words used at home to describe toileting
- Ensure families are made aware of the service's nappy changing and toileting procedures

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at orientation. Reinforce the service's values for developing children's independence and minimising the role of adults as children grow.

- Explain to families the ways that child care professionals will share information about children's nappy changes and toileting. For example, identifying the frequency of nappy changes in a daily journal or providing parents with information about toilet learning and then following up with verbal feedback.
- Provide families with practical strategies to support their children to toilet independently. For example, suggest that families dress their children in clothing which helps them to be independent such as pants with elastic waistbands instead of zips and buttons.

What should be considered when developing and reviewing policies and procedures?

Nappy changing and toileting procedures need to be developed and reviewed in consultation with families and child care professionals. Some families' beliefs and practices relating to nappy changing and children's toileting may not be consistent with recommendations from recognised authorities.

While services should respect the practices used at home, the practices used in the service relating to hygiene and safety should not be compromised. Child care professionals need to communicate to families which practices are non-negotiable to ensure the wellbeing and protection of children and adults in the service.

For example, a family may introduce toilet training at home by allowing their child to walk around with no nappy. While this may be manageable at home, in a service it would compromise hygiene standards. In this situation, child care professionals would need to explain to the family why the practice is not suitable in a group care setting and agree upon alternative strategies.

Positive toileting experiences in outside school hours care services

In outside school hours care services privacy is the primary issue for most children. If a child has a toileting accident, they may feel anxious that their peers will judge them negatively, start calling them names or embarrass them in front of others.

School age children will generally be able to use the toilet without adult support, guidance or supervision. However, some school age children with additional needs may require adult assistance. This support should be discussed in confidence with the child and their family, and practices developed to maintain the child's privacy and dignity at all times.

Useful strategies for staff to consider in outside school hours care services include:

- Keeping a container of spare underwear, clothing and wipes in the bathroom for children to discreetly access if they have a toileting accident
- Informing children of how to store wet/soiled clothing, and why it is important to maintain good hygiene practices such as correct handwashing techniques and cleaning the bathroom area.

Conclusion

Becoming competent in toileting skills is a learning process for children and a major milestone in developing their independence. Adults play a crucial role in supporting children to develop their self-help skills.

Nappy changing and toileting procedures can be effective and a positive experience for children when families and child care professionals provide supportive environments. Interactions and behaviours need to be responsive to children's individual requirements and abilities ■

References and further reading

- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2005). *Staying healthy in child care: Preventing infectious diseases in child care* (4th ed.). Canberra: Australian Government.
- 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.