

RESPECTFUL TOILET LEARNING

Considerations:

1. Children go through a sensitive period* for toilet learning around 12-18 months.
2. Prepare the toileting environment.
3. Establish routine times for bathroom visits.
4. Use positive language and communication.

*A sensitive period is like a 'window of opportunity'. A specific limited period of time, like a bright light shining on a particular aspect of the child's development. They are universal and occur in all children all over the world. Contemporary researchers have found that a brain fast mapping of names occurs only when a child is on the verge of the vocabulary spurt (Honig, 2007).

The psychology development of a child is enhanced by independence in toileting respectfully. Montessori reminds us (Standing, 1976, p. 35), "No one can be free if they are not independent." Montessori's approach and general principles to support toileting is concerned with the adult removing obstacles so a child can learn to use the toilet independently.

Learning to go to the toilet is a period of time that brings together both physical (development of the sphincter) and psychological (feeling positive about being able to achieve this) readiness. Each child has their own individual process and time as no two children go through this learning the same way. One of the keys to success is establishing routine times for bathroom visits that become an almost automatic part of the day.



Language/Communication

- Build a relationship during changing time between child/carer
- Adults need to use a matter-of-fact tone when speaking to the child. A good time to offer going to the toilet are after food or before bed, before & after a bath or after every 2 hours.
- Adult's attitude and language is more successful the more consistency there is between the relevant adults at home. 'Let us go to the toilet', 'It's time to sit on the toilet', 'Let us change into another nappy/ pair of pants', 'I can see you need to use the toilet', 'Oh there is some urine on the floor, lets clean it up and get dry pants.'
- The child does not need praise or rewards for accomplishing a natural bodily function but rather encouragement to toilet in the accepted way, 'Yes, you did do a wee/poo in the toilet.'
- If a child feels ready to learn toileting, they may tell us they have done a wee or poo.
- Toilet learning is a natural process, there is nothing yukky or dirty about it.

Movement/Health

- Change wet nappies as soon as you detect them. As you do talk about what you are doing so your child starts to gradually become aware that the wetness of the nappy has come from their body.
- If child feels ready, they may tug or take off their nappy when it is wet or soiled.
- A readiness sign if the child moving to a private place to poo in their nappy.
- Easy to put on and off clothing.

Independence and Community

- Independence only takes place when obstacles are removed.
- Routine/regular-during transitions

- Put your child in cloth nappies from birth. When your child wears cloth nappies they are helped to become aware when they are wet much quicker than if they are wearing disposable nappies which have been specifically manufactured to make your child feel dry for long periods of time.
- When your child wears cloth nappies they are exposed to the feeling of wanting to eliminate followed by the feeling of being wet. This soon helps the two sensations to be linked in the child's mind. The biological feedback sent to their bladder helps them to gain control over their bladder much faster.
- Provide a child-sized toilet chair in the bathroom so your child starts to make a proper association between it and its function.
- Give your child access to clean underwear, preferably in a basket or cabinet near a small toilet chair.
- Provide a lidded container with a little water and for wet pants.
- Have a child-sized mop or floor cloth available for cleaning.
- Provide a stool to act as a low seat for changing underpants and to stand on to reach the sink to wash their hands., and a towel and washcloth on a low hook or within easy reach for your child.

Self-discipline and Well-being

- Observe signs of readiness: physical development, emotional, maturation, intellectual
- Understand what the child is going through – bodily awareness and no nappies.
- The transition from nappies to underwear happens much sooner and more easily when it is started earlier rather than later.
- It will still take time for a child to be completely dry and it helps to remember that every time they do not make it there on time is just another feedback mechanism for the child.
- Is the child crawling away? Is it time now to change to pulls up/stand up?

Montessori (1961/1989) recognized, “It is at the early age of one month that the child begins to need these calls and invitations from the outer world... repetitions are needed to awaken his interest. To create a cycle of acquaintanceship...” (p. 74).

She also knew that “The muscles as they grow strong, await a command of the will to coordinate them. A child develops not simply as a member of the human species but as a person” (1956/1970, p. 83).

Kramer (1967) cites Montessori who said, “First we have to teach the simplest things- walking in a straight line toward a goal, use of the toilet, use of the spoon-and then we try to fix their attention on their sense perceptions, taking them for walks in a garden, for example, to stimulate their senses of sight and smell by means of flowers of different sizes, colours and perfumes” (p. 76).

References:

- Montessori, M. (1956/1970). *The child in the family*. Avon Books.
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- Kramer, R. (1967). *Maria Montessori: A biography*. USA: Perseus Publishing.
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