

# Whose job is it to toilet train your child?

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**Should I venture here? I hesitate, as I worry people may interpret this conversation as finger pointing or laying blame. To set you at ease, allow me to disclose that, up until my pre-teen years, I used to wet my pants – quite often – and wet my bed. I don't do it now. (Although after having children... well, that is a different story.)**

**Please take this as an invitation to have a conversation that will support both you, as a parent, and will support your child(ren) to be self-managing, capable individuals.**

I heard a comment this week suggesting that it was the job of the new entrant teacher to toilet train their pupils. To the best of my knowledge that is not what teachers are employed to do.

As a society we expect children to come to school being ready to engage in learning. Being school-ready means a child is able to manage their toileting needs. (Of course, there will be some children for whom this is a work in progress due to their different abilities.)

There is increasing worry for parents to ensure their children are able to toilet train themselves.

As parents, it is your role to be a leader in the family, and to support your child(ren) to be able to manage themselves, and take their place in the world. Mastering the skills of toileting is a crucial first step for a child becoming an agent in their own life.

Children are learning a great deal when they learn to care for their personal hygiene. If we want to support them to be the best they can be, this early skill of toileting is key.

## So what are the building blocks needed for toilet training?

### 1. Physical skills

- Physical ability to sit upright on toilet or potty and not fall off. Using a potty low to the ground is a good place to start.
- Ability to undress and dress, including coping with buttons, zips and knowing how to plan and sequence dressing and undressing.
- Control of the muscles that are responsible for controlling the evacuation process.

### 2. Sensory Processing

- Awareness of soiled and wet nappy i.e. body awareness, tactile discrimination.
- Awareness of need to toilet (with enough time to get there).
- Ability to cope with the sensory environment of toileting (noises of flushing toilet and taps at the sink, echoing sounds of tiles, hand dryers, bodily smells, smell of air fresheners).
- Attention to task and ability to sit still long enough to toilet (more than five minutes without an adult needing to help the child stay sitting).
- Ability to respond to internal cues i.e. reading the body's signals and managing the feelings of toileting.
- Ability to manage external elements including toilet seat, toilet paper, smell, noise, clothing on skin.



### 3. Concept understanding

- Comprehension of the sequential steps of toileting and dressing e.g. pull pants down before sitting on the toilet.
- Attempts to remove clothing in readiness for toileting.
- Attempts to request or communicate needs to others e.g. "I need to go to the toilet."
- Awareness of the routine or sequence of toileting.
- Awareness of the task that is required of them when in the bathroom.

### 4. Communication

- The ability to follow simple adult-directed routines and a lack of avoidance behaviors e.g. where the child simply refuses to do as instructed because an adult is interrupting the child's play or activity.

## Tools to help us parent through toileting:

- Making a decision about when you think your child is ready. Listen to when your child is saying "I can do it", and notice if your child goes off to a quiet place to have a poo. This will typically occur between about 20 months and 3 years of age.
- Having the tools and resources (including energy) to support your child to independence e.g. clothing that is easy to take off and undo.
- Practicing by role playing and demonstration.
- Reading books about toileting.
- Having activities such as drawing books that help children to learn.



The development of other problems can be prevented when we support our children to manage their toileting needs, as they will also learn:

- To understand what is being said to them
- To follow instructions
- Self-care
- To interpret and respond to sensory stimulation in the environment and their own body
- Planning and sequencing
- Self-regulation



## If we do not support this important early skill, children may:

- Have difficulties with sensory processing and 'feeling' other sensations such as cuts and burns, which can be very dangerous.
- Have delays of other skill development.
- Have difficulties with the planning and sequencing of other self-care tasks, which can look like disinterest or "I won't" when in fact, it can be "I can't".
- Experience social isolation, possible bullying, and a disruption to daily social events. For example a child may not be able to attend social events with ease e.g. have sleepovers away from the family home.

## What to look out for:

- If toileting becomes a power play then it may be best to leave it and try another time – we want to ensure the child has power and control over their toileting not the family
- If parents get too involved with the process. It is the child who needs to learn and practice not the parent.



## Additional Support:

Please contact [Madeleine@resilientkids.org.nz](mailto:Madeleine@resilientkids.org.nz) for further information about specific support and parent coaching



## Resources for parents:

<https://wellingtonchildcare.com/toilet-learning/>

<https://childdevelopment.com.au/areas-of-concern/self-care/toileting/>

<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/soiling>

[https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/sites/kidshealth/files/pdfs/Soiled\\_Pants\\_Pamphlet\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/sites/kidshealth/files/pdfs/Soiled_Pants_Pamphlet__2_.pdf)

## For schools:

file:///C:/Users/madel/Downloads/Toilet\_Tactics\_Kit\_Final\_Locked.pdf