

# Child Health Notes

Promoting early identification and partnerships between families, primary health care providers & the community.

Distributed by the Lewis County Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) and Parent to Parent.  
Contributors: UW Center on Human Development and Disability and Washington State Department of Health



EarlySupport for  
Infants and Toddlers  
(ESIT)



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## TOILET TRAINING FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Toilet training is an important milestone for all children and their parents, but can be a difficult skill to master, even for typically developing children. **Toilet training is an important step in personal independence**, which opens up opportunities for taking part in a wider range of activities. In addition, there are practical benefits for caregivers, including time and financial savings connected with the cost of diaper changing.

**Children with special needs often face additional challenges with toilet training.** Children with physical disabilities may need adaptive equipment, which their occupational therapist or physical therapist can help with. Children with cognitive impairments or other developmental disabilities may need behavioral approaches that break the process down into manageable steps. Children with sensory sensitivities need help dealing with these impediments. **There are many resources available**, often directed toward the needs of children with autism but usually relevant for children with any developmental delays.

**When considering toilet training, parents need to consider several factors, including signs of readiness, special challenges their child may face, and the need to coordinate an approach across all of the child's environments (i.e. home, daycare, school).**

### Toileting readiness skills:

**Age:** mental age over about two years

**Awareness:** of being wet, of toileting routines, of needing to go

**Physiologic factors:** dry periods, regular bowel movements

**Motor skills:** can they sit up, get on the toilet, and manage clothing?

**Medical:** are there medical issues that contraindicate toilet training? (for example, constipation)

### Challenges to toilet training for children with special needs:

Communication problems

Sensory issues: awareness of needing to void; aversions to bathroom noises like toilet flushing

Sensitivity to overstimulation

Need for routine

Motor planning problems

Deficits in imitation skills

Increased anxiety

Problems with generalization and maintenance

**When parents are interested in working on toilet training, the first step is to assess readiness and to look at the process from the perspective of their child to identify potential impediments.** If they believe their child is ready, the next step may be to **keep a toileting chart** and use it to capture information about the timing of their child's urination or bowel movements each day. This will provide information about appropriate times to take the child to the toilet as well as to figure out how to break the task down into small steps that can be individually taught. **Set realistic goals**, understanding that each step toward independent toileting is a goal in itself. **Visual supports** can be added to clarify steps and expectations and to build positive routines. If their child is in school, they can also work with the special education teacher, both for advice and to ensure that the approach is coordinated between home and school. Toileting goals can be added to the IEP.

**HABIT TRAINING** is a structured approach that can be used when parents have not been successful with a more casual approach. It uses systematic procedures, begins with intensive up-front training, and must be coordinated across all settings, with all caretakers involved. There are books and online resources available to parents who want to use this approach. **A referral to a psychologist or behavior analyst with expertise in habit training** may be especially helpful for parents of children with autism or cognitive impairments, who have struggled with toilet training.

**Habit training: When to use it**

- When you want to train quickly (2 days)
- When child has not learned from other techniques
- When awareness of need to void is limited or not present
- Child does not demonstrate awareness of soiled diapers or clothes
- When a child is 5-6+ years old and not yet trained, and has a mental age of 2-4 years

**TOILET TRAINING RESOURCES**

**BOOKS**

- Maria Wheeler, *Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism or other Developmental Issues* (2007)
- Mark Wolraich, MD, *American Academy of Pediatrics Guide to Toilet Training* (chapter on toilet training children with special needs)
- Azrin and Foxx, *Toilet Training in Less Than a Day* (1989)
- Dunlap, Koegel and Koegel, *Toilet Training for Children with Severe Handicaps*  
available at: <http://education.ucsb.edu/autism/behaviormanuals.html>

**WEBSITES**

- TEACCH approach <http://teacch.com/educational-approaches/applying-structured-teaching-principles-to-toilet-training-susan-boswell-and-debbie-gray>

**SPECIAL NEEDS INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:**

<b>Local:</b>	InTot Growing Together Parent to Parent of Lewis County	(360) 748-4359 (360) 736-5906 (360)0736-9558 ext. 107
<b>Regional:</b>	WithinReach Family Health Hotline  ParentHelp123.org  Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Program (formerly ITEIP)  Parent to Parent Support Programs of Washington  The Center for Children with Special Needs  Washington State Medical Home	1-800-322-2588, 1-800-833-6388 TTD <a href="http://www.withinreachwa.org">www.withinreachwa.org</a> <a href="http://www.ParentHelp123.org">www.ParentHelp123.org</a> <a href="http://del.wa.gov/development/esit/">http://del.wa.gov/development/esit/</a>  Main number: (360) 725-3500 (800) 821-5927 <a href="http://www.arcwa.org/parent_to_parent.htm">www.arcwa.org/parent_to_parent.htm</a> <a href="http://www.cshcn.org">http://www.cshcn.org</a> <a href="http://www.medicalhome.org">http://www.medicalhome.org</a>
<b>National/ Internet:</b>	American Academy of Pediatrics AAP Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics American Academy of Family Physicians CDC Act Early Family Village (Extensive family resources for CSHCN) Family Voices (Links to national and state family support networks)	<a href="http://www.aap.org">www.aap.org</a> <a href="http://www.dbpeds.org">www.dbpeds.org</a> <a href="http://www.aafp.org">www.aafp.org</a> <a href="http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html">www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html</a> <a href="http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu">www.familyvillage.wisc.edu</a> <a href="http://www.familyvoices.org">www.familyvoices.org</a>