



Understanding Children

Children and Sleep



Children have amazing amounts of energy. They can play for hours and don't want to miss out on anything going on around them. In fact, if adults don't intervene, most children will bypass naps and put off bedtime for as long as possible.

However, regular rest and sleep are necessary. Just as food is needed for energy and growth, sleep allows the body to relax and refuel for the next burst of energy. Children who do not learn how to rest and relax at naptime often become overly tired and have trouble going to sleep at night.

Parents/caregivers also need a chance to relax and have some "down time." After a respite during naptime or a well-deserved night's sleep, adults will be better prepared to interact with children.

Sleep Needs

Young children need lots of sleep. They can't get by on a few hours like adults tend to do. It is not realistic to expect children to operate on the same sleep schedule as adults.

Newborn babies will sleep about 16 hours a day at first. But remember each baby requires a different amount of sleep. Parents/caregivers will soon learn what is "normal" for a particular child. Babies don't know the difference between night and day and will sometimes get them mixed up, sleeping more during the day and less at night.

Place healthy babies on their backs when putting them down to sleep. Research indicates this action can reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome

(SIDS). Do not put babies to sleep on soft surfaces or with pillows or stuffed toys. These could cover a child's airway.

Babies in the first year still sleep a lot. They need at least two naps a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, each lasting from one to three hours.

Toddlers between ages two and three may sleep 9 to 13 hours a day. Many toddlers will take one long nap around lunchtime. Or, they may take two shorter naps.



Preschoolers, ages four and five, need at least 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night. Some will take naps but others will resist going to sleep.

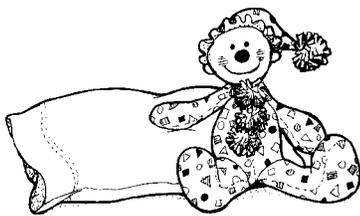
Routines

Routines are important for children. Knowing what to expect helps them feel more secure. Routines help children develop self-control, independence, responsibility, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

Naptime and bedtime routines should be a positive time for both adults and children. A set sleeping routine can help lessen sleeping problems.

An important concept to consider is the difference between putting a child to bed and putting a child to sleep. It is the adult's responsibility to put a child to bed. Then the child has a choice to either rest or sleep. No one can make a child sleep.

There are several things a parent/caregiver can do to establish a calming naptime/bedtime routine. Although each child and family situation is unique, the following ideas may be helpful.



- Give children some transition time. Say, "it's naptime in 10 minutes" or "after I read you a story, it will be time to go to sleep." It may help to use a timer or set the alarm on a clock so children will know when time is up.



- Set rules about number of stories, drinks of water, popping out of bed, etc.
- Plan a wind-down or calming activity. Read a story, turn down the lights, play quiet music, or just talk. TV, movies, roughhousing, or active games are not good choices prior to naptime or bedtime.
- Allow children to have some security – favorite stuffed animals, blankie, night light, the door open, flashlight by the bed.
- Talk about fears and anxieties. Do a "monster check" if that seems to be a concern.
- Avoid activities that compete with resting or going to sleep. Have adults and older children observe similar quiet time. This will encourage the little ones to go to sleep. Remember, they don't want to miss out on anything exciting.

- Decide on a regular bedtime that is approximately 10 to 12 hours before the child needs to get up. If a child is getting up too early, he may be going to bed too soon. On the other hand, if a child is grumpy or drowsy, he may not be getting to bed early enough.

- Adjust daytime naps to support the bedtime schedule. Remember naptime is a time for rest and relaxing. Children may or may not actually sleep during naptime.

As children grow and develop, their sleep patterns and needs will probably change. Other situations also can cause a disruption. These include a new bed; a new room or sleeping arrangement; moving to a new home; disruption in family relationships (new baby, divorce, death, marriage); absence of a family member or pet; or a change in daytime schedule.

Common Problems

Children often wake and call for a parent/caregiver while sleeping. When this happens, give the child some time to go back to sleep. If crying or calling persists, check on the child. Reassure the child that everything is all right and then leave. Sleeping with the child, giving treats, taking the child to parents' bed, etc. will only reward the child and start habits that will be difficult to break.

Night terrors and nightmares are a fairly common occurrence in children. Children having night terrors will wake up suddenly soon after falling asleep. Children may scream, sit up in bed, breathe quickly, be glassy eyed, and also be confused. This can last up to 30 minutes. Children will fall back to sleep quickly and will wake in the morning not remembering anything.



Parents/caregivers should remain calm when children have night terrors or nightmares. Hold the child and talk in a soothing voice. Stay with the child until he/she falls asleep because he/she needs to feel safe and secure.

Children having nightmares can remember the scary details and have trouble going back to sleep. Nightmares usually happen in the early morning hours. Nightmares are often the result of events, situations, or images that trouble a child. Children will have nightmares more often when anxious or under stress.

*Learning how to rest and relax is a valuable skill.
Balancing active and quiet times helps people stay well both physically and emotionally.*

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Understanding Children

Toilet training



■ Ready or not?

Learning to use the toilet is a big event in a young child's life—a sure sign of growing up. Most children are eager about learning how to use the “potty” and are quite proud of their achievement.

Toilet teaching is easiest when children are physically and emotionally ready, which happens between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Girls usually gain physical control over their bowel and bladder muscles before boys do. On the average, most girls are potty-trained by age 2 1/2 and most boys around the age of 3. But don't be alarmed if your child doesn't follow this pattern closely; individual children mature physically at different rates.

The secret to success is patience and timing. Emotional readiness also is important. Many bright, normal, and healthy 3-year-olds may not be interested in learning to use the toilet. Learning new

things is a full-time job for most toddlers and toilet learning may not be as important as learning to climb, jump, run, and talk. A toddler who resists toilet training now may be ready in 3 to 6 months, then often learns almost overnight.

■ How do you tell if your child is ready?

Ask yourself the following questions:

Can my child:

- ___ follow simple directions?
- ___ remain dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day?
- ___ walk to and from the bathroom, pull down pants, pull pants up?

Does my child:

- ___ remain dry during nap time?
- ___ seem uncomfortable with soiled or wet diapers?

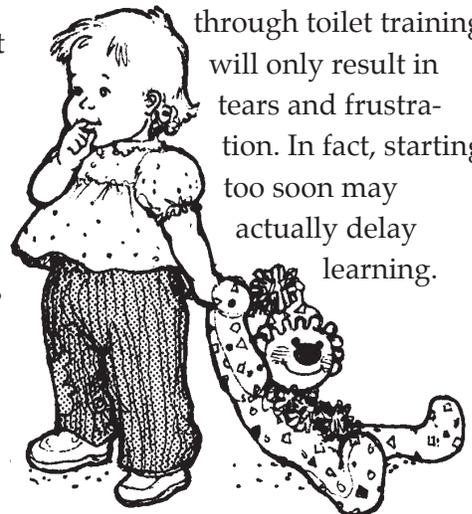
___ show interest in the toilet or potty chair?

___ Are bowel movements regular and predictable? (Some children move their bowels two to three times a day; others may go 2 to 3 days without a bowel movement.)

___ Has your toddler asked to wear grown-up underwear?

If you answered “yes” to most of the questions, you may want to introduce your child to toilet training. If you answered “no” to many questions, wait a while

longer. Rushing a child through toilet training will only result in tears and frustration. In fact, starting too soon may actually delay learning.



When a child is truly ready, toilet training will seem much easier.

■ Ten steps to toilet learning

Step 1

Relax! A calm, easygoing approach to toilet training seems to work best. Remember that learning to use the toilet takes time and that each child is different. If you find that one of your children learns to use the toilet at age 2 and another learns at age 3 1/2, rest assured that you are not alone.

Step 2

Show children what they are to do in the bathroom. Toddlers love to imitate adults or older children. Next time your toddler follows you into the bathroom, talk about what you do when you

use the toilet. If you are comfortable with the idea, it may be a good idea to let the child watch you use the toilet. Ideally, fathers should set an example for sons and mothers should set an example for daughters. Children also can learn about bathroom practices from older brothers, sisters, or relatives.

Step 3

Teach your toddler the words your family uses for body parts, urine, and bowel movements. Make sure it's a word you feel comfortable with because others are sure to hear it. There is nothing quite like a toddler loudly announcing in the check-out lane of the grocery store that it's time to go "Poo Poo!"

Step 4

Help your child recognize when he or she is urinating or having a bowel movement. Most children will grunt, squat, turn red in the face, or simply stop playing for a moment. Children need to be aware that they are urinating or having a bowel movement before they can do anything about it. For most children, bowel movements are generally easier to recognize.

Step 5

Borrow or purchase a potty chair or a potty attachment for the toilet. If you purchase a potty attachment, be sure to get one with a footrest. This will allow your child to sit more comfortably

and make it easier for the child to "push" during a bowel movement. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents avoid urine deflectors because they can cut a child who is climbing on or off a potty chair. You may want to let your child practice sitting on the potty fully clothed just to get used to the idea.

Step 6

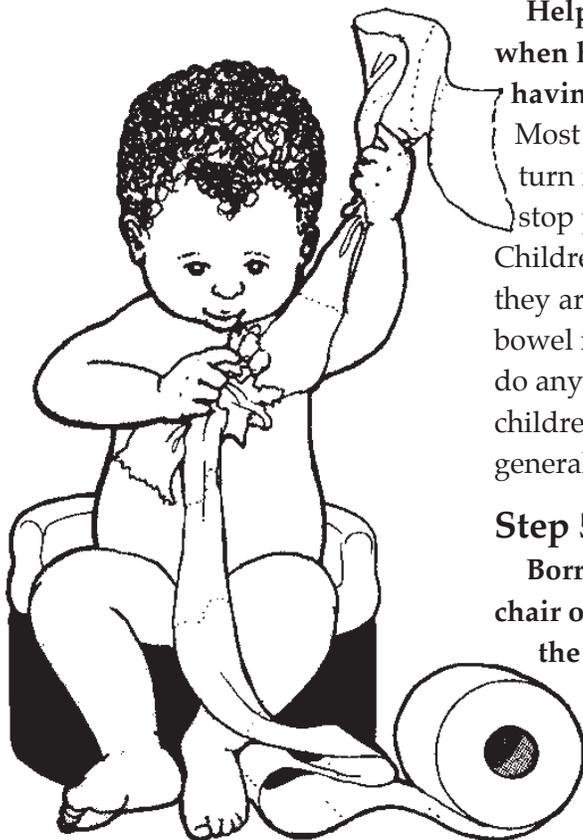
Begin reading potty books to your child. There are many wonderful books about learning to use the potty at your local library or bookstore. Reading a book together helps children understand the general process and that other children also learn to use the potty. Book suggestions are listed later on in this publication.

Step 7

Purchase training pants and easy-to-remove clothing. Just getting to the potty on time is a major task for most children. You can help make the job easier by letting them wear pants that are easy to pull down, and by being around to assist. Avoid snaps, buttons, zippers, and belts. Some parents prefer to use diapers or disposable training pants at first and then switch to cloth training pants when their child is urinating in the potty several times a day.

Step 8

When your child tells you that he or she needs to use the potty, help with clothing and sit the child on the potty for a few minutes. Stay with your child. It's



a good idea to keep a few books close by. Reading a book together takes the pressure off for an immediate result.

Step 9

After 4 to 5 minutes, help your child off the potty. Reward with hugs and praise if your child's efforts have been successful. Say that he or she can try again later if the child wasn't successful. Don't be surprised if your child has a bowel movement or urinates right after being taken off the toilet. This is not unusual. Accidents and near misses are generally not an act of stubbornness. It simply takes time to learn this new skill. If accidents seem to be frequent, it may be best to hold off and try toilet training a few months later.

Step 10

Wipe your child carefully. Wipe girls from front to back to prevent infection. Teach your child to *always* wash hands with soap and water after using the potty.

More ideas

- If possible, plan to devote at least 3 to 4 days to begin toilet training. Maintaining the same routine for 3 to 4 weeks also helps.
- Some parents find it helpful to establish a routine by putting a child on the toilet for 3 to 4 minutes right after he or she gets up in the morning, before naps, after naps, after meals, and before bedtime. Realize however, that your child will not always use the potty.

- If you are anticipating a new baby, moving to a new home, or another major life event, you may want to wait a few months. Toilet training is easiest when both parent and child can give it their full attention.
- Remember that it's OK to keep your child in diapers or disposable training pants for sleeping. Nighttime control generally comes many months after daytime control.
- It may be helpful to use a plastic mattress cover, tablecloth, or shower curtain between the sheet and mattress until children gain nighttime control.
- Treat accidents casually. Avoid punishing, scolding, or shaming. Give your child support by keeping an upbeat, positive attitude.

Cleaning up

Children often are quite curious about bowel movements. If you find your child trying to remove fecal material from the toilet, or worse yet "finger painting" with it on the bathroom floor, try to remain calm. Simply explain that it's not OK to play

with feces or urine; help your child clean up the mess. Then you both can wash your hands with soap and water. It is generally a good idea to help with clean-up and flushing during much of the toilet training process.

The big flush

Children often have one of two reactions to flushing. Either they are fascinated by it (and would be willing to do it for hours) or they are quite fearful. Children who enjoy flushing will often delight in emptying the potty chair into the toilet, waving bye-bye, and watching everything "flush away."

Children who are fearful prefer that parents take charge of this process. Before flushing the toilet, make sure the child is off the potty attachment. Many children are not only fearful of the noise and swirling water, but also may think that they will be flushed down too. Reassure your child that only body wastes and toilet paper will be flushed away.



■ A note about bedwetting

Bedwetting is common in children under age 7. Remember that learning to control the bladder generally comes after bowel control. Many children who have mastered the toileting process during the day may not be able to stay dry at night for many months. Most children will achieve nighttime dryness by age 5, but one out of four children may continue to wet the bed for several more years.

Bedwetting appears to be related to the size of the bladder, the amount of liquid consumed before bedtime, and how soundly the child sleeps. Bedwetting also is more likely to occur when a child is ill, excited, or when a routine is upset.

For children who tend to wet the bed, it may help to wake them once during the night to use the toilet. An easy time to do this is just before parents go to bed. Persistent bedwetting, particularly after age 7, may be caused by an infection or allergy and a physician should be consulted.

■ Books for children

No More Diapers, J.G. Brooks—

A popular book with toddlers. Toilet training is illustrated through two stories. The first story is about Johnny and the second is about Susie. The text is simple and drawings are in black, white, and orange.

Your New Potty, Joanna Cole—

This book tells the story of two children, Ben and Steffie, who are learning to use their new potties. Illustrated by colorful photographs. Information for parents is included in the introduction. Uses adult terms for elimination.

Once Upon a Potty, Alona

Frankel—Simple text with cartoon-like illustrations.

Available in both a boy's and girl's version as well as a book and toy package, complete with an anatomically correct doll and toy potty.

All By Myself, Anna Grossnickle

Hines—One of the few books that talks about nighttime dryness. Josie, like most children, has successfully mastered daytime control, but at night still needs help from her mother to get to the bathroom. In time she learns how to manage by herself.

Going to the Potty, Fred Rogers—

Part of the Mister Rogers Neighborhood First Experience series, this colorful book discusses toilet training. Photographs show children of all sizes, ages, and ethnic groups.

KoKo Bear's New Potty, Vicki

Lansky—A "read together" book with cartoon bear illustrations. A useful companion to Vicki Lansky's *Practical Parenting: Toilet Training*.

■ Books for parents

Parents Book of Toilet Teaching,

Joanna Cole

Practical Parenting: Toilet Training,

Vicki Lansky

Toilet Learning, Alison Mack

■ Read more about it!

For more information about infants and toddlers, ask for these publications at your county extension office.

Understanding Children: Disciplining your toddler, Pm-1529c

Guide to Healthy Kids: What Parents Can Do, NCR-374

Understanding Children: Fears, Pm-1529d

Ages and Stages, Pm-1530a-i