**Welcome to Head Start’s Toileting Tips for Tots!**

**Setting the stage! Preparing Your Child for Toilet Training**

Children typically start toilet training between the ages of 18 to 30 months. Around the child’s first birthday, parents can start stimulating the child’s interest by reading books about toilet training together. Parents can also bring up the subject in conversations, saying things like, "I wonder if Fuzzy Bear needs to go to the restroom to sit on the toilet"? or "I have to go pee-pee. I'm going to use the toilet!” Introducing the child to the routines and vocabulary involved in using the toilet helps the child become comfortable with the concept of toileting before the actual training begins.

**Let’s get started: Knowing When Your Child is Ready for Toilet Training**

Children develop at different stages, yet there are certain signs that alert parents to their child’s readiness for toilet training. Although girls tend to be ready to toilet train a little earlier than boys, the readiness signs for both are the *same*. Here are guiding questions to help determine if your child is ready to start training.

Does your child show independence and an interest in learning how to use the toilet? If your child shows curiosity about using the toilet and starts asking questions when you or a family member uses the restroom, then this could be a sign the child is showing an interest.

Does the child understand and use words related to using the toilet? If your child says things like “My diaper is wet.” or “I need to go pee-pee,” this might be a signal that your child realizes a need to go to the toilet even if his or her diaper is already soiled or wet.

Ask yourself, can my child

* follow simple instructions?
* keep his or her diaper dry for at least two hours?
* pull down his or her training pants, underwear, or diaper with little or no help?
* get on the toilet, stay on the toilet long enough to use it, and get off the toilet independently?

Does my child

* make a connection between having the urge to go and using the toilet?
* copy the behavior of others in the household, including bathroom habits?

If yes, then maybe your child is ready to start toilet training!

**Begin the toilet training process!**

As toilet training begins at your house, we encourage you to use exact language for bodily fluids and private body parts. Introduce to your child words that express the act of using the toilet, such as "pee," "poop," and "potty". Avoid negative terms like “dirty” or “stinky” because they might embarrass your child.

To start, plan for less interruptions by setting aside a few days in a row, such as a holiday break or an extended weekend, to devote to toilet training. This provides the child a stable routine and you the time and patience required to work with your child.

Or you might prefer to take a more gradual approach over a longer period. Do try to avoid training during uncertain times of change or high stress, such as moving into a new home, traveling, or around the birth of a new sibling to avoid your child attributing negative connotations or feelings to learning how to use the toilet.

Most children benefit from a consistent routine when toilet training. Here are a few ideas to begin the learning process.

Use a toilet training chair or child-size toilet seat that sits on top of the toilet seat with a step stool. The stool keeps the knees bent and feet supported. This helps your child go.

Encourage your child to sit first on the toilet chair while still wearing clothes. Then transition yourchild to sit on the toilet chair or toilet *without* a diaper or training pants for a few minutes. Try not to force your child to sit or stay on the toilet. Allow your child to get up if he or she wants to. Toilet training should not be associated with punishment or embarrassment. Offer praise for trying even if your child simply sits on the toilet for a few minutes.

Help your child use the toilet after waking up from a nap with a dry diaper, or 15-30 minutes after a meal, or 45 minutes to an hour after drinking liquids.

Talk to your child about how the toilet works using simple positive terms. You can even dump the contents of a dirty diaper into the toilet and allow the child to flush.

For boys, it's often best to master urinating while sitting down, and transition to standing after bowel training is complete.

Stay with the child, read a book together, or play with a toy while the child sits.

Squirming, squatting, or holding the genital area may be signs of needing to use the toilet. Teach your child to become familiar with these signals. Praise your child for recognizing when to go.

Dress your child in loose clothing that is easily removed.

Teach your child how to wash his or her hands immediately after using the toilet.

After a couple of weeks of successfully using the toilet and remaining dry during the day, the child might be ready to trade diapers for training pants or underwear. Celebrate the transition together! Consider using a sticker or star chart as positive reinforcement for each time the child uses the toilet successfully.

Every child is different. It can take anywhere from three to six months for children to toilet train successfully. Some children master the skill quicker than others. However, it may take a child longer to remain dry overnight. Allow the child to return to diapers if the child is unable to remain dry just yet.

If your child resists using the toilet chair or toilet, take a break from toilet training. Chances are that your child is not ready just yet. Hurrying the process can lead to unneeded frustration and power struggles. Try again in a few weeks or months. If by age four your child does not show signs of readiness, talk to his or her pediatrician about your concerns.

**Preparing your child for School**  
Start preparing your child in the months leading up to the first day of school. Be consistent with toileting routines at home and practice proper wiping and handwashing.

Let your child rehearse using the toilet without your assistance and role play how to communicate his or her toileting needs with the teacher. Address any issues that your child may be struggling with. For example, if your child has problems unbuttoning his or her pants, switch to bottoms with an elastic waist.

Head Start staff works closely with you to make your child’s transition into the classroom a positive experience. Share with the teacher about your child’s toilet needs, or any changes that might be affecting him or her. If your child has not mastered using the toilet just yet, the Head Start teacher will create a personalized toilet training schedule for the classroom. The teacher will recommend using the same training schedule at home. Reinforcing the same routine at home helps support the child’s learning and development. It also fosters self-sufficiency and independence as the child reaches this important milestone!

As accidents are bound to occur at school, make sure to send an extra set of clothes to school with your child. The clothes should be loose and easy for your child to change into when an accident occurs.

Finally, every child is different. Some children require more time to master toilet training skills than others. Toilet training is a learning process, and like many other things, this is another opportunity for you to support your child and celebrate life’s successes together.

**Conclusion**

Congratulations! You have finished Head Start’s Toileting Tips for Tots. You are now able to download your certificate of completion.