

# CHILD CARE

plus +

SUMMER 1999

Supporting Inclusion in Early Childhood Settings

Vol. 9, No. 4

## + The ABC's of Toilet Learning

Of all the milestones children accomplish, such as walking and talking, toileting seems to create the most struggle.

When toileting is viewed simply as another learned skill, however, the approach can be more relaxed. One of the humbling truths providers must face is that while they can influence children's learning, children are in charge of what is learned—and when.

You play a crucial role in helping children learn to be independent in toileting. Supporting children's natural inclination to learn, providing the tools that make learning a bit easier, and using your knowledge and experience help structure the learning process. If a child is truly going to be the one learning, it is the child who needs to be actively engaged in the process.

Understanding the difference between training and learning is critical. You can use musical toilets, stickers, reward charts, fancy underwear, tinkle targets, cereal treats, or candy to toilet train a child. These tactics do not work unless the child is ready anyway and, more importantly, do not reflect appropriate early childhood practice. An effective method of helping children learn about toileting can be accomplished in three stages.

**A** Introduce toileting concepts gradually and early, and introduce them in playful and natural ways by using everyday routines. Read aloud—and let children read—books about toileting. Include a child-size toilet and a doll-size toilet in the dramatic play area. During diapering, label body parts and talk about what they do. When appropriate, allow opportunities to learn from peers. Natural exposure to toileting concepts prepares children for learning and gives them endless opportunities to become more and more independent.

**B** As children learn about toileting, watch closely for signs that they are ready to start experimenting. Follow

each child's lead and encourage children's interests. Common readiness signs include staying dry for several

hours, dressing and undressing themselves, awareness of wet/dirty diapers, physically being able to get on and off the toilet, using toileting words, asking questions, and interest in watching others use the toilet. Readiness signs, however, simply show the child's growing

interest, they are not signs that you should be more directive or attempt to "train" the child. Be ready for children's interest to ebb and flow. Even a child who is fairly successful may take a break from learning this new skill and go back to diapers. The most important role you can play at this stage is to provide support without making demands.

**C** Allow children to set the pace and level of intensity of their learning. Trust that each child will eventually become independent and master toileting at his or her own pace. Some children may experiment for months before expressing interest in actually using the toilet. Others may sit on the toilet for months before they achieve success. Children learn to toilet independently only when each mental, physical, and emotional skill is mastered.

Toileting is a personal milestone for each child. By facilitating—rather than directing—children's toilet learning, you help them experience the joy and satisfaction of the learning itself. +

SAM

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## + FROM THE SOURCE

### Team Support for Toileting

There are aspects of the toileting process that are challenging for children with disabilities. It is always a learning process based on the child's physical maturation and readiness. You can get help planning toileting adaptations from parents and other members of a child's team by asking the following questions:

- Is there any physical or medical reason the child might have difficulty learning toileting skills?
- Does the child know how to communicate the need to go to the toilet in some recognizable way?
- Has the child learned how to unfasten or unzip and pull down and pull up pants or panties? What ways can clothing be modified to make this easier?
- What adaptations are needed to make it possible for the child to get on and off the toilet?
- How can independent handwashing be achieved?
- What needs to be done to ensure that toileting experiences are consistent in each environment throughout the child's day?

A child's achieving independent toileting is a major milestone. Some children with disabilities will always need toileting assistance to some degree, and others may just need a bit of extra time and help in becoming independent. + SLM

## + MAKING IT WORK

### Toileting Dos and Don'ts

Young children depend on significant adults to support their learning and give them the tools they need to learn. With toilet learning, that means that you:

- do actively engage children in practicing, reading about, watching, and talking about toileting.
- do surround them with helpful tools—potty chair or stool to reach the toilet, books, training pants, extra clothes.
- do make the bathroom area pleasant and friendly.
- do allow plenty of time for learning and recognize that children learn from trying and making mistakes.
- do be patient and trust in each child's competence
- don't bribe, demand, or force children to use the toilet.
- don't forget to include parents during the process.
- don't set performance requirements. Young children are particularly sensitive to pressure. One of the most natural, yet frustrating, reactions to "pressure to perform" is that children become less competent.
- do be understanding when a child has an accident. A sympathetic reaction helps reduce the performance anxiety that often accompanies toilet learning. Mistakes are bound to happen when learning a new skill. + SAM

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## + NOTES FROM HOME:

### Parents Want To Know

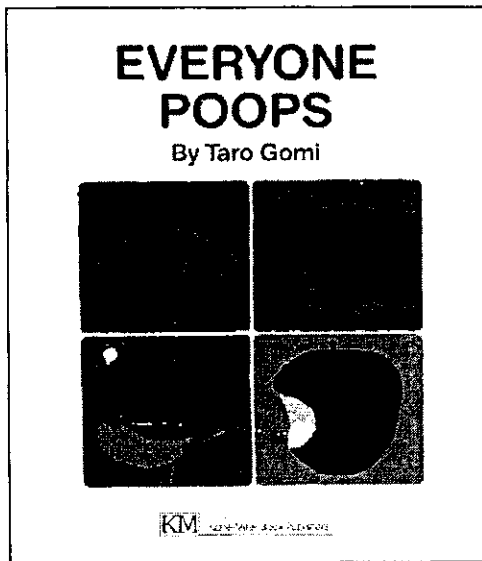
My two-year-old has been enrolled in a great child care program for over a year, and we've just had our first major conflict—over toilet training! I think Amanda should be getting out of diapers, but the teachers were not being very helpful or supportive of the idea. I'd ask how many times she'd gone potty, and they didn't know. Once I sent her in panties because she'd been wearing them over the weekend, and she was in diapers when I picked her up, the panties in a plastic bag—wet! I finally spoke to the center director, and we scheduled a conference to discuss how to proceed with toilet training.

I went to the meeting frustrated, anxious to convince staff to get working on toileting. I came out of the meeting with more respect for the teachers. They described how they handle toileting at school, literally showing me the children's toileting and handwashing routine. They pointed out how they had modified the sink and the toilet to make it easier for children to be independent. (I particularly liked the non-slip stool by the toilet.) They showed me other ways they help children learn about toileting using dolls and books. We talked about readiness signs and they showed me a list of skills a child needs to be independent. Together we went through the list and identified Amanda's skills. I'd been thinking of doing one of those "toileting intensives" where you train your child in a weekend, but the gentle approach they use seems to fit Amanda's way of learning. She is very strong-willed and likes to do things her own way.

I'm so anxious for her to get out of diapers that it is hard for me to be patient, but it helped to hear that the teachers were doing a lot to let her learn at her own pace. One thing still bothers me, though. I think the child care program should be more up-front about how they approach toileting so that, as parents, we know what to expect. Toileting should be a chapter in the parent handbook for any program that has toddlers! +

## + SPOTLIGHT

# Children's Books About Toileting



Children's interest in toileting and toilet learning are effected by their environment. Providing children's books about toileting is part of creating a learning environment. Following are just several of many books appropriate for young children on this topic. These particular books appeal to children from babyhood through preschool. While these books are available at bookstores everywhere, parent reviews and price quotes may be found on the internet.

### *Everyone Poops*

by Taro Gomi

Amanda Mayer Stinchecum (Translator)

March 1993

Kane/Miller Book Publisher

27 pages

Pages and pages of colorful illustrations of animals and people who poop. This frank and delightful book discusses poop in detail and successfully makes the point that everyone does it!

### *Uh Oh! Gotta Go!: Potty Tales from Toddlers*

by Bob McGrath

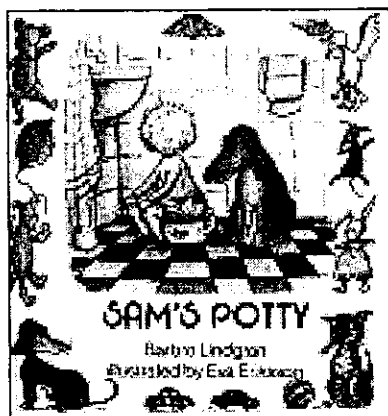
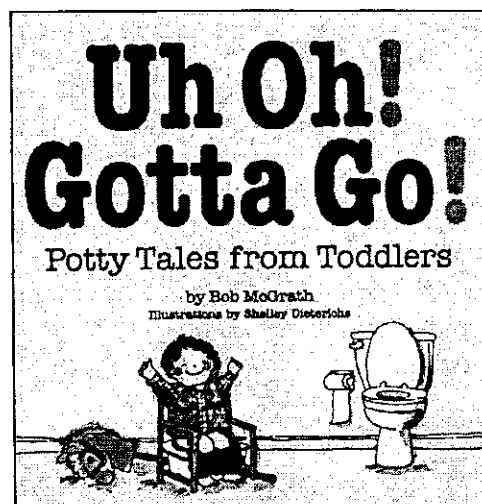
Shelley Dieterichs (Illustrator)

September 1996

Barrons Juveniles

34 pages

Twenty-seven humorous vignettes are cleverly captioned illustrations designed to help parents and kids cope with the challenges of toilet training. Throughout the book, McGrath's sentiment—that neither parents nor children need to take potty training too seriously—is made crystal clear.



### *Sam's Potty*

by Barbo Lindgren

Eva Eriksson (Illustrator)

September 1986

William Morrow & Company

32 pages

In demonstrating that his potty is intended for him rather than Doggie, Sam overcomes his dislike for it. +

## + What do I do when . . . ?

**QUESTION:** We recently removed "must be toilet trained" from our preschool program's enrollment guidelines. While we want to make sure our program is open to all children, how are we going to take care of diapering needs when we do not have diapering facilities?

**ANSWER:** You may have to be a bit creative, but diapering a preschool child generally does not present as many challenges as you might think. First, at enrollment, talk with parents about their child's strengths and needs, including toileting needs. When a child requires diapering, work together to fit this activity into your program. In fact, this is exactly what the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) asks early childhood programs to do—determine case-by-case best practices for including each child. When you follow this process, you will discover that children with disabilities' toileting needs vary greatly. One child may simply need help transferring from wheelchair to toilet, and another child may need only an occasional diaper change because the child's actual time in your program is so short.

Second, you probably have already had experiences with preschool children that can help you plan to meet the needs of children who need diapering or toileting assistance. Think about the respectful way you currently deal with a child who gets wet and needs a change of clothes. Can the private area this child uses be adapted to meet diapering needs? Can a child be diapered in a standing position using an existing bathroom stall? Could you create a private space by draping or screening off an area in the bathroom or classroom? When a child is most easily diapered lying down, a floor mat can be added. This type of low-cost arrangement can be designed to meet local health regulations including proximity to a water source and the use of a changing surface that can

be easily cleaned and disinfected.

Remember, consider the needs of one child at a time. Your everyday efforts to meet the needs of individual children will support you when you include a preschool child who needs toileting assistance or diapering in your program. +

SHW

Child Care plus+ staff are available to answer questions, brainstorm, problem-solve, and provide resources and information about toileting. Call 1-800-235-4122

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

The *Child Care Law Center* is a national nonprofit legal services organization founded in 1978. Their primary objective is to use legal tools to foster the development of high quality, affordable child care—for every child, every parent, every community. CCLC is the only organization in the country that focuses exclusively on the complex legal issues surrounding implementation of the ADA—including toileting—in child care. For information, write Child Care Law Center at 973 Market Street, Suite 550, San Francisco, CA 94103, call (415) 495-5498, or visit <http://www.childcarelaw.org/>.

*CHILD CARE plus+* is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators. *CHILD CARE plus+* is published quarterly. Subscription price is \$ 5.00 per year (four issues). Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

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