



Heart-centred
home-based ECE
Educator Professional Development

Toilet Learning

Using the toilet is a very natural process that develops at the child's pace, rather than when the parent decides the child is going to be toilet 'trained'.

*"Learning to use the toilet is a natural process that begins when your child's desire to be grown up and his neurological development have reached the point where he can control his bladder and bowels. **We don't train children to use the toilet, we support them when they are ready.**" (How to Raise an Amazing Child: The Montessori way to bring up caring confident children, by Tim Seldin)*

Avoid the toilet 'training' programmes that require you to sit a child on the potty or toilet every half an hour whether or not they wee. These do work for some tamariki but they don't support your tamaiti to fully understand when their bladder is full which is an essential element of toilet learning. These types of programmes also take away any ownership from the child and are purely there for adult benefit not to support independence and a positive experience for children. Many times children will regress or need to stay in nappies at night for a lot longer than if you take your time and let the process occur naturally.

A gradual process

"There should be no pressure, no reward or punishment, no adult deciding when the child should learn to use the potty. The environment is prepared and the child is free to explore and imitate in these natural developmental stages." (The Joyful Child)

- We can begin very naturally when tamariki are quite small, talking with them about what you are doing. "Did you do wees/poos, let's get you into a clean, dry nappy". When changed say "There you are, all dry and clean"
- Try to avoid negative language such as 'stinky' or 'yucky' or pulling faces when changing their nappy. These are natural bodily functions, not something they should be ashamed by.
- A potty can be available from a young age so the child can sit on it and imitate others in the household, even before they have bladder and bowel control.
- Children often begin to be interested in toilets around 1 year old, although at this age they mostly just want to watch it flush or play in the water.
- At this time, tamariki may begin to develop the physical ability to control their bladder but remember every child develops at a different pace so it's not 'one size fits all'.
- As tamariki become more physically capable, you may notice that nappy changes become less frequent and that your tamaiti holds their wees for when the nappy is off, instantly peeing on the change mat (and you).
- This is a sure sign that they may be ready to begin toilet learning so you can begin to incorporate toileting into the child's routine.
- Offer the potty/toilet at times when they often wee, e.g., on waking, before going outside, after coming in from outside, after lunch/before nap etc.
- Say "It's time to use the toilet before we put your pull-ups on" etc. If your tamaiti is not keen, don't force it. Leave it and come back to it later.

- As your tamaiti becomes more aware of their body they will begin to tell you if they need to go.
- When they do, avoid making out that it's the most amazing thing they have ever done, or giving them a reward/sticker chart to encourage. Extrinsic rewards are not going to speed up this process.
- Do not interrupt your tamaiti when they are playing to rush them to the toilet unless you notice them doing a potty-dance or poop-face.

Foster independence

- You can start to choose clothing that they can pull up and down by themselves.
- Encourage them to take off or put on their own pants/shorts to support them to develop this skill.
- As tamariki begin to learn that it feels nicer to be dry, they will hold on for longer periods.
- You begin encouraging them to sit on the toilet or potty before you put a clean nappy on but DO NOT force this. If they are not keen, leave it a little while and try again.
- If using a potty, it is a good idea to keep it in the bathroom rather than moving it around the house so your tamaiti can always find it.
- Go shopping together for some underpants. Avoid saying "big boy/girl" instead say "let's go and buy some comfortable underwear" – reinforcing the idea that wearing these are going to feel good.
- Make sure they fit – tamariki are not at all comfortable in underwear that is too small or baggy.
- Encourage wearing the new comfortable underwear when you are at home and perhaps pull-ups instead of nappies when you are going out.
- Once your tamaiti is showing interest in using the toilet or potty the bathroom can be set up to give the child as much independence as possible:
 - Get a child-friendly toilet seat and step
 - Have a pile of dry clothes available
 - A pack of water wet wipes
 - A bucket for wet clothes
 - A pile of clean underwear/pants
 - Some cloths for wiping up puddles
- When you don't make it to the toilet/potty in time don't make a big thing of it. This is perfectly natural and there will probably be many occasions where your tamaiti is not yet fully aware or becomes engrossed in what they are doing and just don't realise they need to go.
- "Let's get out of those wet clothes and support your tamaiti with the process until they can get their own dry underpants and put their wet ones in the bucket."