

# Memo

September 18, 2024

**To: School Leaders and Prekindergarten Directors**

**From: Barbie Perdomo, Early Education Specialist**

**CC: Jim Rigg, Gabriel Cambert**

**Re: Toileting Assistance- Best Practices in ADOM Schools/Centers**

## Overview

Toileting independence is a highly variable milestone for young children, with some achieving it early and with ease, while others may require additional support to master this foundational aspect of self-care. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recognizes that toilet learning is both a physical and cognitive process, requiring a combination of body awareness, motor skills, and the ability to follow multi-step instructions. According to the AAP, children need to:

1. Be aware of their body's signals and have bladder and bowel control,
2. Develop the fine motor skills necessary to pull down and up their pants and underpants,
3. Understand and follow multi-step instructions for using the toilet, and
4. Be willing and motivated to use the toilet.

In the United States, toilet learning typically begins between two and three years of age, with most children becoming largely independent by the age of four. However, even after achieving toilet independence, children may still need assistance with certain tasks or experience occasional accidents or regressions. **Setbacks in the toileting process are often triggered by significant life changes or stressors, such as welcoming a new sibling or starting at a new school.**

This memorandum provides toileting guidance and responds to the frequently asked questions the Office of Catholic Schools receives regarding toileting for children who attend an Archdiocesan prekindergarten program. It is important to note that these guidelines are based on general expectations. They may be adjusted based on the specific facts and circumstances at the discretion of the principal. We encourage flexibility and adaptability in our approach to ensure the best outcomes for our students consistent with the considerations outlined herein.

## Learning Environment Considerations

All students deserve a warm and safe environment that creates a sense of belonging and connectedness and helps students to feel supported. Toileting is a skill to be taught and mastered over time and incorporating the following best practices can assist in planning and fostering children's independence.

- Involve the child's family in developing a toileting plan to build skills that are both culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate to be used both in the home and at school.
- Build bathroom times into the daily schedule to establish a consistent routine, while also allowing children to access the bathroom as needed.
- Read books and incorporate toileting picture books into the classroom library and centers where appropriate (e.g., dramatic play, science areas).
- Ensure that each child has one or more sets of extra clothes available. Parents may need to be reminded to send in a replacement set of clothing each time that the child has a toileting accident.
- Family members should generally not be required to leave home or work to change their child. It causes undue hardship for both the child and the family. Leaving a child sitting in their soiled clothing, even for a short period of time, can impact the health and wellbeing of a child (e.g., urinary tract infections, rashes, and irritated skin).
- Generally, a child should not be sent home when a toileting accident occurs. School personnel should reference a child's individual toileting plan. Any time you send a child home, it disrupts the learning process, impacts the child's social-emotional wellbeing, and negative feelings can develop toward school.
- All staff should be trained in proper procedures for assisting children with toileting accidents, including maintaining the child's dignity and privacy.

Reflecting our Catholic values, all interactions with children during toileting accidents will be conducted with respect, compassion, and understanding of each child's inherent dignity as a child of God. In our commitment to create a safe and supportive environment for all children, when a toileting accident occurs, staff will assist the child in a way that promotes self-esteem, independence, and hygiene.

When assisting a preschooler with a toileting accident, it is crucial to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, particularly regarding child safety, privacy, and teacher protection. Following proper procedures emphasize maintaining the child's dignity while safeguarding staff against potential liability issues.

## Proper Procedures for Assisting Children with Toileting Accidents

### 1. Preparation

- **Ensure that the program is equipped with necessary supplies, including:**
  - Spare clothing
  - Disposable gloves
  - Wet wipes
  - Plastic bags for soiled clothing
  - Mild soap and water
  - Disinfectant for cleaning surfaces
- **Protective Equipment:**
  - Always wear disposable gloves when assisting with toileting accidents to maintain hygiene and reduce the risk of cross-contamination.

### 2. Immediate Response

- **Recognize the Situation:**
  - Calmly and discreetly acknowledge the accident without drawing unnecessary attention to the child.
  - Reassure the child that accidents happen and that it's okay.
  - Help the child clean up quickly and efficiently to minimize discomfort and embarrassment. Offer positive reinforcement and reassurance.
- **Safety and Supervision:**
  - Guide the child to a private, safe, and comfortable area (e.g., a bathroom or designated changing area) where they can be cleaned up.
  - Maintain supervision to ensure the child feels safe and supported.
- **Staff Presence:**
  - Whenever possible, ensure that two adults are present or within sight when assisting a child with toileting needs. This could be a second staff member or being in an area that is visible through an open door.
  - If two adults are not possible, assistance should be provided in a way that is observable by others while still respecting the child's privacy.
  - Any adult providing toileting support must be a member of the school staff, not a volunteer or parent helper.
- **Respectful Communication:**
  - Speak to the child in a calm and reassuring manner. Emphasize that accidents are normal and that they are not in trouble.

### 3. Assisting the Child

- **Encourage Independence:**
  - Encourage the child to clean themselves as much as possible, fostering independence. Offer verbal guidance and support while allowing them to participate in the process.
- **Hands-On Assistance (if necessary):**
  - If direct assistance is required (e.g., wiping, changing clothes),
  - Ask the child, "Do you want me to help you?" Maintain the child's dignity by covering them appropriately during the process. Use towels, clothing, or privacy screens as needed.
  - Avoid unnecessary physical contact. Only provide the necessary amount of assistance.

#### Cleaning Up the Child

- **Personal Hygiene:**
  - Put on disposable gloves.
  - Assist the child in removing soiled clothing, encouraging as much independence as possible while providing support as needed.
  - Use wet wipes to gently clean the child's skin.
  - Be mindful of the child's comfort and privacy.
- **Changing Clothes:**
  - Assist the child in putting on clean clothes. Offer praise for their efforts to participate in the process.

### 4. Cleaning and Sanitizing

- **Soiled Clothing:**
  - Place soiled clothing in a sealed plastic bag to be sent home with the child at the end of the day. Label the bag discreetly with the child's name.
- **Sanitizing Surfaces:**
  - Disinfect surfaces in contact with soiled clothing or accidents. Use approved cleaning products according to the program's sanitation policies and procedures (Keep cleaning products out of children's reach).
- **Handwashing After Assistance:**
  - Staff and children must wash hands immediately after toileting, cleaning or sanitizing.

### 5. Documentation Practices

- **Accident Report:**

- Document the accident using the program's standardized accident report form. The report should include:
  - The date and time of the accident
  - A brief description of the incident
  - The assistance provided
  - The names of staff members present during the assistance
- Keep the documentation factual and objective. Avoid subjective language or opinions.
- **Confidentiality:**
  - To the extent possible, documentation related to the accident should remain confidential and should only be shared with authorized staff and the child's parents or guardians. Avoid discussing the incident in front of other children or adults.

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## 6. Communication with Parents

- **Informing Parents:**
  - Inform the child's parents or guardians about the incident at pick-up time. Provide a brief, reassuring summary of what occurred, emphasizing that accidents are normal at this stage of development.
- **Frequent Accidents:**
  - If a child experiences frequent accidents, work collaboratively with the family to develop a plan that supports the child's toileting progress. Ensure that any ongoing communication is documented. Such toileting plan will be based on the particular facts and circumstances including the frequency of the accidents and the age of the child.

### Child Protection and Compliance

- **Adherence to Laws:**
  - Ensure that all staff members are trained in state and local regulations regarding toileting assistance and child protection laws. This includes understanding mandated reporting requirements and the program's policies on physical contact with children.
- **Reporting Concerns:**
  - If staff notice signs of potential abuse or neglect related to toileting practices, they must follow the mandated reporting procedures required by law. This protects the child and fulfills the program's legal obligations.

