

# MOMENTS FROM...

## THE INFANT, TODDLER, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD ROOMS

### Infant Room: Toilet Education

By Donna Pellegrin

Toileting preparation in the Infant Room is an on-going process that we incorporate into our daily opportunities of diapering. While diapering a child, we introduce and use language to explain the process and to assist the child as he begins to understand and identify what is occurring. This helps children to be successful in their toilet learning as they grow and helps make diapering a pleasant experience for adult and child alike.

We start with our youngest babies, using diapering as a time to create a foundation of understanding. We tell the child everything we are doing, thus fostering trust, building communication, and assisting in language development. We use simple phrases such as: "You have a BM in your diaper;" "I'm going to lay you on the table and give you a clean diaper;" "Can you hold your diaper?" "I'm opening the tabs," etc. We mention parts of the child's body: arms, legs, hands, and feet.

Once the child begins to stand and walk, we diaper them in a standing position, in front of a full-length mirror rather than horizontal on the changing

table. This gives the child the opportunity to see all that is happening and aids in the development of self-care. Our children's diapers and wipes are kept on low shelves in the bathroom, within their own reach. The child gets his own wipes and pulls out his own diaper from his box. You'll notice each box is labeled with a photo of the child—as well as his written name—so the child can identify which box contains her things.

As we move through the process of diapering, we talk about everything we are doing: naming, identifying, narrating, and speaking in a friendly, matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone. We want the child to have a sense of participation in his own diapering. If the child is able to, she can help by pulling down pants, unsnapping "onesies," and opening or closing diaper tabs. At the end of the process, the adult washes her own hands, explaining to the child, "I am washing my hands" and then offers a wipe for the child to also wash his hands. This communicates to the child that the steps for toileting include hand-washing, and thus helps establish a life-long pattern of healthy hand-washing after using the toilet.

We have a potty seat in the diapering room. If a child shows interest, we will ask if he would like to sit on the potty. The presence of the child-size potty in the space enables the children to become familiar with it as a normal object of their environment. Thus, it is not strange or foreign to them when

they are ready to move to that stage of their toilet education. Some children choose to sit on the potty with a diaper on; others will sit with the diaper removed, at times urinating or having a BM. The child may choose to come back to sit another time, or may not. Sometimes the child sits while looking at a book (just like Daddy does!).

We recognize that while it is early developmentally to engage in the formal process of toilet learning for most of the children in our room, the presence and vocabulary of toilet education begins to lay a foundation for healthy toileting habits as they grow and become more ready.

At home, you can help the child participate in his own diapering. If the child is able to stand, have him stand up whenever you change him. Ask your child to help: by choosing a diaper, getting the box of wipes, pulling down or pulling up pants, picking out a dry shirt. Have your child wash hands or use a wipe, along with you. Try to be neutral when it comes to soiled diapers. Making bowel movements and making urine are a natural part of life and we all need to eliminate our wastes through our bodily functions. When we engage in conversational tone with the child about what is happening—without judgment or harsh language or reprimand—the child can feel natural and comfortable, and will not develop shame or fear around her body or bodily functions. We use the



◀ Jonti Craft (800-543-4149) makes an extra safe, acrylic plastic mirror with a distortion free image, which is perfectly sized for children. The stand can be removed and placed in two ways, so the mirror can be used in either the horizontal position (for infants) or horizontal position once the child can stand. 13" wide x 48" high

terms “BM” and “urine”—rather than slang words—as a way to convey our respect to the child. We do a lot of naming work with our children at this young age, as part of our Montessori approach. We believe that giving children real words gives them the tools to understand themselves and the world around them. This helps them to learn to communicate effectively with others.

Our approach to diapering begins to educate and engage the child in a supportive, cooperative experience that leads to self-care and language development as a part of a stress-free and caring toileting experience. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like more information about how you can continue this approach at home.



## Toddler Room Transitioning from Diapers: How we help our Toddlers

By Jeanne Cooper and Diana Mendez

**T**oilet Education in the Toddler Room is a wonderful experience in assisting our children to gain independence. In our work at the Montessori Children’s Center, we strive to enable our little ones to have as much independence as possible and sometimes it is easier for us here than it is at home. We have designed our bathroom specifically with this education process in mind. We have toilets that are small and at the child’s height—so they are comfortable for little bodies. We have a mirror at the child’s level. The mirror allows each child to get a full-length view of their body and enables them to see themselves as they sit on the toilet. We also provide a small stool that enables the child to sit down and change their own clothes.

Most children have the muscle control to regulate themselves between 18 months and 3 years of age. Children begin to show that they are ready for toilet education by displaying a number of readiness signals:

- Able to sit down and play quietly for about five minutes
- Able to help dress and undress self
- Able to understand and follow simple directions
- Takes pride in his or her accomplishments
- Has bowel movements at regular times every day
- Has well formed bowel movements
- Is able to remain dry for about 2 hours at time
- Can urinate a good amount at one time
- Shows imitative behavior
- Wants to put toys and other possessions where they belong

We often get a very clear message from children because they ask to use the toilet, or even go so far as to pull down their pants, take off their diaper, and sit right down on the toilet or potty!

When we begin transitioning to toilet education, we ask, “Would you like to sit on the toilet?” If the child answers “yes,” she has a choice of three toilets—two are traditional toilets and one is a small chair with a plastic bowl cut out in the center.



Sometimes children prefer one shape or fit better than another. At home, you might see what happens if you place a small plastic potty next to your adult toilet. If you are comfortable, it is very helpful to use the bathroom at the

same time as your child. At the Montessori Children’s Center, adults do not use the bathroom at the same time as the children, but because we always have an open door into the children’s bathroom, all the children are able to gain a sense of comfort and naturalness around the concept of toileting. This integration of toileting in their everyday routines helps to support the child as he begins his transition to toilet education at this age.

Our children are already familiar with the words we use to express the natural bodily functions: “urine” “BM” “bottom” “toilet”. Naming the functions helps them to understand what is going on, become familiar with their own bodily process, and helps them express what is happening.

If you can use these words at home, it will help in creating consistency during the toileting process.

We provide books to help a child relax as she sits on the toilet. Helpful books include: *Once upon a Potty* by Alona Frankel; *The Potty Book for Girls* or *The Potty Book for Boys* by Alyssa Satin Capucilli; *Everyone Poops (My Body Science Series)* by Taro Gomi; *All by Myself!* By Aliki.

When a child is finished, we encourage the child by saying, “You did it!” Or we might say, “You were listening to your body, you knew you had to use the toilet!”

We sometimes hear our children say “I made a BM by accident.” We treat an accident as a learning experience. We tell that child, “that’s okay,” without passing judgment or reprimand. It is natural for children to have accidents as they transition to using the toilet every time and we want each child to trust us to help them through the process without feeling anxiety, stress, or pressure.

If a child is oppositional or disinterested in this process, we will not push him to use the toilet, although we do continue to invite him. We want to elicit cooperation

from the child, and until he wants to cooperate, we do not force him.

With parents reinforcing the methods used by the teachers at the beginning and end of the day, over the weekends, and during holidays, the child has a sense of consistency in the toilet learning process. As always, it is important that parents and teachers maintain communication about the child's progress and share any concerns or questions while we work together to help the child begin to master this skill.

Using real underwear enables the child to feel wetness. Diapers and pull-ups are so well designed to wick away wetness that the child has no idea what is happening and this slows their learning process. It is important for the child to experience the sensation of wetness so he can begin to utilize the muscle control that is now available to him. Disposables keep the child from experiencing the cold, damp discomfort of wet cloth. The discomfort helps motivate the child to stay dry. You can purchase thicker "training" underwear that provides your environment with a little more protection (less leakage), while still enabling the child to feel the wet or dry.

If the child does have an accident, let her feel it for a few minutes before you help change the clothes. You can talk about that feeling of being wet because urine or BM is in the underwear.

Once a child starts their transition to toilet education, please allow him the time he needs to adjust, and don't go back to diapers or pull-ups. You may decide you need some extra help for nighttime in the form of a pull-up, or you may find that your child can, in fact, make it through the night.

We consider toilet education to be a process that will help children gradually master toileting as an important human behavior. We work to ensure that their toilet learning is a non-stressful experience that is appropriate to each

child's individual development and involves the child, parents, and teachers. We believe that when children are in a group care situation, parents and teachers can work as partners so that children can be comfortable, confident, and successful while they learn toileting skills.

Toilet education in the Toddler Room is a fun experience for the child. It is one of the most important parts of the work we do to help a child gain a sense of independence, confidence, and self-awareness. We are delighted to be able to work with our parents to help the child achieve this great feeling of success.

If you would like to talk to us about starting the toileting process with your child, or if you have any questions about our toilet education, please let us know. We are here to help you and your child make this transition a fun and pleasant experience for all.



## Early Childhood: Toilet Education

*By Pamela Serra*

**I**n the Early Childhood classroom, many of the children are already independent in regards to their toileting, while some children are still in the process of mastering the skill. We work with the children who are beginning to learn about toileting and we work with the children who are still in the process to help them achieve independence in toileting. It is such a milestone when their independence has been accomplished. The children feel a sense of pride and satisfaction at their own developing ability to care for themselves.

As new and young children join the class, they are encouraged to use the toilet by their own observations of older children using the bathroom. The

variety of ages present in a Montessori classroom supports children learning from each other in all aspects of their learning, including learning about using the toilet. The teacher helps the child who is new to toileting by inviting her to use the bathroom every hour, and thus gains knowledge of the child's schedule and pattern. Once the adult begins to know the child's usual time, she can help ensure success by inviting the child to use the toilet at that specific time. Some children are more internally regulated than others. To help everyone in the class have ample opportunities to use the toilet, we promote bathroom time throughout the day: upon arrival, a half hour after eating or drinking, before and after nap, before going outside.

During certain bathroom times, a teacher is present in the bathroom to guide children in toileting: sitting on or standing at the toilet for an extended period of time; how to pull one's own pants up and down; how to wash and dry hands. These reminders and modeling help set the foundation for the times of the day when the child uses the bathroom on his own.

Our bathroom environment is designed for independence and success. Each child keeps his extra clothes in a storage bin that is labeled with his own photo and name. The bins are set out at the child's level for easy access. Each bin contains 2 sets of clothing. If a child needs to change out of soiled clothing, it is an easy choice for the child to select what to wear. The child puts the soiled clothes in a bag to bring home. We ask that parents return clean items to school the next day, so that a set of clean clothes are always available for use whenever necessary.

Toileting presents an opportunity to expand children's vocabulary. We use actual names and words when discussing toileting: urine, urinate, toilet, bathroom, BM, and bowel movement. The children are at an age when they quickly pick up new words thus we want to give them accurate language for effective communication.

### *What do we do when accidents happen?*

We treat accidents as a natural part of a learning process. We help the children learn from an accident by treating the situation as a problem that has a resolution. We involve the child in the resolution. Bathroom accidents occur for a variety of reasons. For example, the child may be unclear about body signals; the child is engaged in an activity

and waits too long; the child's clothing is difficult or cumbersome to remove; the child is unable to pull down pants or underwear far enough. By encouraging the child to become part of the solution by removing soiled clothes, putting clothes in the hamper or the laundry area, wiping their own body, choosing dry clean clothes, getting dressed, parents can help support the child's growing

independence and sense of control. Sometimes children may need help with the resolution process. But when the adult gives support by letting the child help himself as much as he is able, rather than quickly rushing in to resolve the problem, we help in a larger way by supporting their developing independence and sense of self-worth. Children gain much by being able to do things themselves and knowing that we, the adults in their world, trust them and believe in their ability to do it themselves. The process becomes easier and easier through practice, experience, and time.

Toilet education is a progression that begins in the Infant Room and continues through the Toddler Room and into the Early Childhood Room. At every age, the child becomes more familiar with the experience and reaches another level of understanding and ability. The process of toilet education may take a long time or a shorter time, and may sometimes feel like a challenge. With patience, consistency, role modeling, child involvement, and acceptance of accidents as a learning tool, the children do become independent in toileting and feel good about themselves along the way!



## HELPFUL TIPS:

*Here are some tips for helping your child have a successful and positive experience:*

- Invite your child to use the bathroom at transition times: coming home; a half hour after meals; before bedtime; in the morning upon waking
- Have your child wear clothes with an elastic waist
- Avoid buttons, snaps, zippers, and belts when purchasing clothes for your child
- Show the child how to pull pants up and down
- Avoid many layers of clothes
- Show the child how to flush the toilet
- Show the child how to wipe
- Be accepting of accidents as a normal part of learning