

TOILETING

What Is This Developmental Skill?

Toileting is the ability to recognize the body's signals, use the toilet, manage clothing, clean oneself, and complete related hygiene routines. Successful toileting requires physical readiness, body awareness, communication, memory, motor coordination, and emotional security.

How Does This Normally Develop?

Children usually develop toileting skills gradually. They first become aware of wetness or discomfort, begin recognizing the need to urinate or have a bowel movement, and learn to communicate that need. With calm instruction and repeated practice, they learn the sequence of entering the bathroom, managing clothing, using the toilet, wiping, flushing, and washing their hands.

Accidents remain developmentally normal while these skills are emerging.

How Can Neglect Interfere With Its Development?

A child may not have received consistent toilet training, reminders, clean clothing, or access to a safe bathroom. Stress can also interfere with the child's ability to notice internal body signals. Some children may have been punished or humiliated for accidents, causing anxiety, hiding, or avoidance.

Children who were expected to manage toileting alone may have learned only part of the routine.

What Might This Look Like?

The child may:

- Have frequent daytime or nighttime accidents.
- Wait until the last possible moment to use the bathroom.
- Hide soiled clothing.
- Refuse to use unfamiliar toilets.
- Forget to wipe, flush, or wash hands.
- Become distressed when adults discuss toileting.
- Appear unconcerned about being wet or soiled.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers should approach toileting as a developmental skill rather than a behavior problem. The child may need scheduled bathroom visits, visual reminders, simple instructions, easy-to-manage clothing, and calm assistance. Accidents should be handled privately and without shame.

Medical causes should be considered when accidents are persistent, painful, or accompanied by constipation or other physical symptoms.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of asking, "Why are you still doing this?" the caregiver can recognize that the child's body awareness, routines, or sense of safety may still be developing. An attuned response might be: "Your body is still learning to tell you when it is time. I will help you remember."