

## Toilet Training and School Readiness.

There is much in the news about children being ready for school and toilet training and as you can imagine we discuss this a lot at preschool! In fact, we talk about toileting a lot in general, as it is such a major milestone and absolute basic need for everyone!

One aspect of this we talk about what support is needed to learn to wipe themselves properly, enabling children to be independent and I have found this really comprehensive guide. <https://eric.org.uk/potty-training/learning-bottom-wiping-a-step-by-step-guide/>

Here are a few highlights from this step-by-step guide:-

- For some children, not being able to wipe independently prevents them from feeling able to use the toilet when away from their parents/carers. This can lead to [stool withholding](#), which can begin the vicious circle of [constipation](#).
- Many of these children also feel unable to use the toilet for a wee, for fear of a poo popping out, resulting in [wee withholding](#).

Both of the above we often see in Children and it can go on to cause continence issues in reception.

### Is your child physically ready??

**Try this test:** can your child touch their opposite ear over the top of their head? A similar bend is needed to reach their bottom, so if they can do this, they should be able to wipe!

Bottom wiping can be more of a challenge if the child:

- Has little awareness of how their body works.
- Does not see a need to learn the skill.
- Struggles to adopt routines.
- Is unwilling to do anything without assistance.
- Has sensory issues – for instance a fear of touching poo.

For many, bottom wiping is a pattern that needs to be learned. Once learned, it becomes a process we can do without thinking. Next time you wipe your own bottom, be aware of the pattern you use, and think of all the steps your child will need to learn.

### Step 1: How to prepare

- Start by learning at home, where the environment is familiar.

- Make sure your child is able to sit securely on the toilet. They should be able to sit with their feet flat and firmly supported, with their knees higher than their hips – they may need a children’s toilet seat and a step stool to achieve this.
- Is your child going to sit or stand to wipe? Either is fine but pick one and stick to it. If your child finds it hard to balance sitting on the toilet, they may be better standing, holding on with one hand or bracing against the toilet.
- Make sure the toilet roll is within easy reach and stored on a toilet roll holder. Your child may find wet wipes easier to manage, as they cling to the hand and clean more effectively. Put a bin beside the toilet ready for used wipes.

## **Step 2: How to practice with toilet paper**

Are you a folder, a scruncher or a roller?

- There is no right or wrong way to use toilet paper, but it does need to cover the hand. Be aware that your child will copy you. If you’re starting from scratch with them, folding is probably the best way for them to cover their hand.
- It can be hard for the child to know how much toilet paper to tear off – too little and they risk getting poo on their hand; too much and they block the toilet. Suggest tearing off a strip the length of the child’s arm. Get them to fold it in half, then fold again. Use it to cover the hand, and pinch with the thumb to hold in place.
- Tearing off the paper can be difficult – our two hands need to do different things: one has to hold and the other has to tear. Lots of practice will help them.

## **Step-by-step practice**

Follow these steps to help your child practice their bottom wiping skills:

1. Help them work out which hand to use. If hand dominance (that is, whether they are right- or left-handed) isn’t clear yet, put paper and a pencil in front of them and see which hand they pick the pencil up with. You might need to try it a few times to be sure! Once you know whether they are right- or left-handed, offer lots of one-handed activities to develop their one-handed skills (dexterity). For example, try singing ‘I’m a little teapot’ and doing the actions, making sure they use their dominant hand to make the handle. It’s an ideal way to practice the inward rotation we use to reach our bottoms.
2. Help your child to understand why they need to learn to wipe their bottom. You could talk about sore bottoms, possibility of infections, being smelly etc.

3. Try sticking post-it notes or sticky labels on the child's clothes over their bottom. Encourage them to reach round and remove them. This will help them learn where they are going to wipe. Draw a little animal or picture on the post-it note – good motivation for the child to grab it, to see what you've drawn.
4. Teach the action of wiping using shaving foam! Spray shaving foam on a surface in front of them. Make a pad of toilet paper and encourage the child to wipe it up in one big scoop (otherwise some children may spread the foam out - and later the poo). Through this exercise, they will see what they will be doing when they wipe.
5. Tape two balloons together to create buttocks. Put shaving foam between the balloons and help the child learn to wipe it away. Start off with the balloons where they can see them, then tie them onto the back of the child's chair, or hold them behind the child. It's messy – but much better to make a mess with shaving foam now, than with poo later...
6. Put some shaving foam on the child's bottom before they get in the bath or shower. Give them a pad of toilet paper, instructing them to do one big scoop at a time to clean it off. Make sure they always wipe front to back.

### **Step 3: How to move on to bottom wiping**

Once your child has practised, move onto wiping their bottom.

- Guide your child's hand so they learn the correct movements. They will soon be relying on muscle memory (muscle memory is a process that allows you to remember certain motor skills and perform them without conscious effort. This happens when you repeat movements until the brain remembers them and does them automatically) so make sure they learn the right way from you first.
- Use the technique called 'backwards chaining'. This means breaking the task down into steps, then teaching the whole task by starting with the last step and working your way backwards to the first.
- Use a hand-over-hand technique – ask them to place their hand over yours when you wipe, so they get used to the feeling.
- Swap round for the last wipe – your child holding the paper, with your hand cupped around theirs to guide them. Bring your hand round where they can see it, so you can check together if the paper is clean.
- Progress to your child holding the paper for the last two wipes, then three – until they are holding the paper from the start.

- When they are ready, reduce to just a light touch, then stop guiding their hand, and see if they can manage just with verbal prompts.
- Gradually reduce your prompts as they learn to manage by themselves.

## Effective wiping

Teach your child to continue wiping until the paper is clean. Think: check, chuck, clean?

- **Check** the paper after wiping
- **Chuck** it in the toilet, or wipes into the bin
- Think – was it **clean**? If not, wipe again.

Always give lots of praise to help build the child's confidence. Always wash your hands together when you have both finished.

At preschool we always try to explain to children why things are important such as how it is important to be clean because of germs that will make us ill and getting sore bottoms. When Children start school, they won't be able to have as much physical support as they get at home or in a preschool setting as there are just not enough adults, so getting these things sorted (most of the time) can really affect a child's experience when they start school.

I hope this is useful for you as parents and please do talk to us if you feel you need more help from us.