

Independence in Toileting

"It's mid-August and preschool is just around the corner! At this time of year we sometimes hear, 'I'm not sure my child will be toilet trained by the start of school. What do I do?'"

At Christian Community School, we require that children are independent in toileting by the first day of school. What exactly does that mean? Independence in toileting means:

- Children can communicate their need to go to the bathroom in advance of having an accident.
- Children can pull down and pull up their own underwear and pants.
- They can seat themselves on the toilet and sit there comfortably.
- They can wipe their own bottoms.
- They can wash their own hands.
- They are able to briefly postpone going to the bathroom if they must wait for another child to finish or if we are outside and need to walk in from the playground.
- Children who are independent in toileting do not wear diapers or pull-ups to school.

We do provide teacher supervision and help as needed with toileting routines. Our teachers also want to encourage children's independence at school and protect children's privacy in personal routines.

We are sometimes asked why Christian Community School requires toilet training prior to attendance. Here are a few reasons:

- As a school, our classrooms do not have changing stations like childcare programs do. (Changing stations are a licensing requirement for programs that change diapers.)
- In a three hour class day, changing diapers and cleaning up toileting accidents impact a teacher's instruction time in the classroom with her students.
- *Independence in toileting is a developmental milestone that is a strong indicator of readiness for preschool. Inconsistency in toilet training may indicate that the child is not yet ready for more structured group routines.*

For toilet training to be successful, it is important to wait for signs of readiness. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the following checklist will help you determine when to start potty training:

- Your child stays dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day or is dry after naps.
- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- Facial expressions, posture, or words reveal that your child is about to urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Your child can follow simple instructions.
- Your child can walk to and from the bathroom and help undress.
- Your child seems uncomfortable with soiled diapers and wants to be changed.
- Your child asks to use the toilet or potty chair.

- Your child asks to wear “grown-up underwear.”

If your child is struggling with toilet training, be aware that there may be contributing factors. For example, when children are going through a significant change or several changes at once they can feel overwhelmed and sometimes lose skills they have already learned or were making progress on, like toilet training. Common situations that can cause stress may include:

- An upcoming or recent family move
- When you are expecting or recently had a new baby
- When family routines change, e.g. a parent is traveling away from home more or there are visitors in the house
- When there is a major illness, a recent death, or some other family crisis
- When your child is sick or not feeling well (diarrhea or constipation, for example)

When stressors are present and your child seems to be having more accidents than usual, know that this is normal. Demonstrate patience, understanding, and consistency with daily routines!

If your child is not demonstrating readiness for toilet training, or if training is feeling overwhelmingly stressful, consider taking a step back. Do not despair if they are not yet ready – they will be, according to their own inner clock. *Follow the child's lead.* This is the approach we take in the classroom with all developmental growth whether it be learning to write their name or learning how to share a toy with a friend.