

# **Inclusion Resources: Toileting Guide for Early Learners**

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### **How do we know when we need to use the bathroom?**

Interception is one of our 8 senses along with taste, touch, smell, vision, hearing, proprioception, and the vestibular sense. It is the ability for someone to sense their bodily functions such as hunger, thirst, being too cold, being tired, and needing to use the bathroom.

While a young child's body and brain knows when they need to use the bathroom, the cognitive part of their brain does not always get this information through the sensation of needing to use the bathroom like most adults do. Children typically develop the ability to control and understand their needs to use the bathroom between 18 and 24 months of age. However, for some children, especially those with disabilities, those who have experienced trauma, and those who experience sensory challenges, the signals of the need to use the bathroom are not always present or consistent. This can lead to accidents, not letting an adult know they have to use the bathroom until it is urgent, or even the need for prolonged diapering.

Communication barriers can also cause the child to be unable to communicate effectively when they need to use the bathroom, even if they are aware and this can be compounded if the child also does not know how to facilitate using the bathroom independently.

Implementing a void schedule can help facilitate the child's body creating an internal toileting schedule and support greater independence in toileting over time. Creating greater independence helps support children in an inclusive setting. A void schedule can also be used to help create structure around toileting for an entire classroom of early childhood learners.

### **What is a void schedule and where does the idea come from?**

A void schedule is a schedule of going to and sitting on the toilet with specific time intervals to allow the different levels of the brain and the body to begin to function together to create predictable toileting needs. This type of schedule is often used by occupational therapists working with adults who have affected nervous systems such as those with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, strokes, and other neurological conditions to create an internal toileting schedule despite the fact part of the nervous system is no longer functioning normally. This intervention gives independence to many adults who would otherwise need to rely on a caregiver for meeting their toileting needs and allows them the freedom of life without the need for adult diapering.

### **What is the process completed at each void time?**

The void process is completed by having each child sit on the toilet for a set amount of time during each void period whether they feel the need to use the bathroom or not. The act of taking down the pants and underwear and sitting on the toilet triggers the brain to determine if the body needs to use the bathroom. This encourages the child's body and brain to regulate toileting according to a times schedule more quickly than simply asking the child if they need to use the bathroom at the scheduled time.

- Sitting for a set amount of time teaches the body and brain that there is a timeframe to make that decision.

- Visual timers can be used to help children understand the amount of time they need to sit on the toilet
- Visual timers or reminders of when the next void time is scheduled for, such as with markings on the classroom clock, can help children prepare for the next scheduled time and help the schedule integrate more quickly.
- Using verbal prompts to redirect the child back to the visual reminders of the void schedule when helping a child decide if they need to go to the bathroom immediately or if they can wait until the next scheduled time can help their nervous system integrate more quickly and helps with encouraging decision-making.

### **How to create a void schedule.**

The timing of a void schedule depends highly on the individual the schedule is being used for. For early childhood learners, a void schedule should be timed based on the classroom schedule with developmental and bladder capacities in mind.

Children aged 3-6 typically need to urinate four to eight times per day, or roughly every two hours. Therefore, creating a schedule that schedules each void time roughly every two hours is optimal. Having each child sit on the toilet for 30-60 seconds ensures their brain and body have time to work together to determine if the child needs to use the restroom. Sample Schedule below.

### **Helping parents understand the void schedule.**

Creating consistency across environments is always beneficial to supporting the work you do in the classroom. Helping parents understand the purpose and function of the void schedule and the schedule you use in your classroom can help create that consistency. Giving parents tips about how to use the void schedule in their own home to support nighttime toilet training can benefit families as well.

### **Tips for Nighttime Toilet Training**

Void scheduling can also be used to support nighttime toilet training by keeping verbal cues and visual reminders consistent across home and school settings. Other tips to support nighttime toilet training include:

- Regulation of when liquids are stopped before bed.
- Ensuring the child is reminded to sit on the toilet right before going to bed.
- Give a reminder before bed each night for the child to get up and sit on the toilet if they wake up during the night (even if they do not feel the need to go to the bathroom).

## Sample Early Childhood Learner Void Schedule



8:15-8:30 Drop-Off



9:00: Bathroom Break



9:30 Morning Snack



11:10 Bathroom Break and Wash for Lunch



11:30-12:00 Lunch



12:20 Bathroom Break



2:10 Bathroom Break



3:00 Afternoonm Snack



3:40 Bathroom Break



4:00 Pick-Up

## References and Further Resources

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