



Signposts

for building better behaviour

Toilet Learning

Facilitator notes

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Toilet Learning Overview

The toilet learning material is to be used by facilitators who are trained in the *Signposts for building better behaviour* program. Signposts facilitators have the knowledge, experience and skills to successfully guide parents to develop a range of skills. These toilet learning materials are a valuable supplement to the Signposts program and can help parents develop their child's toileting skills.

These materials will help you work with parents on a range of toileting behaviours to help them teach their child how to pass urine and bowel motions into the toilet and not be dependent on nappies/pull-ups.

Attending the toilet is something that adults do almost automatically. However, toileting actually involves a number of skills, including identifying the need to attend the toilet, finding the toilet, using the toilet and cleaning up. Some children need extra help to learn these skills. Parents can help their child develop this level of independence by firstly identifying the toilet skills their child already has and secondly teaching them new toileting skills.

The Facilitator Notes provide an overview of the activities and skills that parents need to be familiar with in order to teach their children toilet learning skills. The Parent Notes, designed as booklets, provide the details. Facilitators can print the booklets for parents to use in groups, in face-to-face sessions, via telephone or self-directed. Both the Facilitator and Parent Notes follow the module structure of the generic Signposts program.

Introduction to Toilet Learning

Toilet Learning Introduction

The toilet learning materials are designed to help parents teach toileting skills to their children using the Signposts program.

You do not have to be experienced in toilet training to successfully run a Signposts program focused on toilet learning. Toilet learning is a developmental skill that can be taught using the generic Signposts program.

The toilet learning materials provide examples of toilet behaviours and ways of addressing them using Signposts. Each module guides parents through the stages of the Signposts program that begins with assessing what the child can do, progresses to teaching new skills on a daily basis, and continues with replacing difficult behaviour with useful behaviour, planning for better behaviour and developing more skills.

Additional [resources](#) from state and national continence agencies can also be used to enhance your knowledge of toilet learning and continence issues and provide further information to assist parents who are developing toilet learning skills in their children.

Health Check

Most children can learn toileting skills without any medical intervention, but for some children there can be a medical reason why they are struggling with this skill. A thorough medical assessment needs to be done by a doctor or a continence service; however parents can refer to the Health Check list of symptoms of constipation or urinary tract infection to see if there are any potential medical problems.

It's best to alert parents to the Health Check list one to two weeks before the program begins. This will allow them time to seek out appropriate assistance if required. Note that the checklist is a guide only; and that it is not mandatory for parents to get a medical check-up for their child.

[See Parent Notes Introduction page 7 for Health Check list.](#)

Using a continence nurse advisor to co-facilitate

If you feel that your program could be enhanced with contributions from a continence nurse advisor (a registered nurse with additional training and skills in the area of continence) you can find details for suitable services in the [resources](#) at the end of this introduction.

As a trained Signposts facilitator you already have the skills to assist with toilet training from a behavioural perspective. A continence nurse advisor can contribute to this area of skill development as well as provide more guidance with the health check.

Using the toilet learning supplementary materials

When you became a Signposts facilitator you participated in training which included the content of the program and how to deliver it. You also had the option to co-facilitate with an experienced facilitator.

Before you begin using the Signposts toilet learning supplementary materials read these Facilitator Notes as well as the Parent Notes to familiarise yourself with the content. Use the toilet learning materials in conjunction with the standard Signposts program.

The parent notes contain many examples of toileting behaviour to help facilitators and parents develop an understanding of the range of toileting behaviours.

The toilet learning materials refer to the generic program frequently and to help parents move easily between the supplementary resources and the generic program, stickers have been provided to place in the appropriate positions in the workbook and modules.



These stickers will alert parents to refer to supplementary material or to encourage them to respond to activities that can be related to toilet learning.

An A4 sheet of stickers is available in the [Parent Resources](#). Details of where to place the stickers are included in the [Parent Notes Introduction](#). Sticker placement should take no longer than half an hour and can be completed by parents in Session 1.

We recommend you deliver the Signposts program in its entirety and refer to the supplementary toilet learning notes as you work through the program.

[See Parent Resources for A4 sheet of stickers.](#)

[See Parent Notes Introduction page 10 for Module sticker placement.](#)

[See Parent Notes Introduction page 13 for Workbook sticker placement.](#)

Toilet learning skills

Toilet learning is a skill that needs to be taught to children. The Signposts toilet learning materials provide parents with the expertise required to teach their child new skills that can be combined over time to work towards the goal of toileting independently.

Although the goal for all parents/carers is for the child to be free from nappies and toileting independently, many children may not have enough skills to achieve this ultimate goal. Goals for the period of the Signposts program could include all or some of the skills listed on the [Toileting Skills](#) list.

[See Parents Notes Module 1 page 8.](#)

Toileting words and phrases

The act of attending the toilet is a very private event for many people. Most adults don't openly discuss bodily functions and while some parents are quite comfortable talking about toileting issues, others may feel uneasy.

[For examples of recommended words and phrases see Parent Notes Introduction page 4.](#)

Toilet learning readiness

When teaching toileting skills there is a lot of talk about readiness. Many people are unsure about what to look for when determining if their child is ready to learn toileting skills. Many children are not ready to learn toileting skills until the age of two or three years. Children with learning difficulties may take longer.

Typical bladder/bowel development is as follows:

- » **At 9 months to 1 year** children develop bowel motion control when asleep. If a child is waking with a bowel motion in his nappy it is most likely that he has been awake while passing the bowel motion and then gone back to sleep.
- » **At 18 months to 2 years** children are aware that they are passing urine or a bowel motion.
- » **At 4 to 5 years** most children can 'hold-on' to urine or bowel motions for a longer period of time because their central nervous system has developed. Before this age, a child can use the muscles in his pelvis to stop urine or bowel movements.

Disposable nappies, cloth nappies and readiness

Some parents may have not provided their child with a toileting opportunity because they feel that their children are 'not ready'.

Readiness was easier to determine when cloth nappies were more widespread. Typically a child would wet the cloth nappy, feel uncomfortable and indicate discomfort. Both parents and children were keen to change this behaviour as the parent had more washing to do and the child was uncomfortable in the wet cloth nappy.

Also, with cloth nappies it was easier to detect the length of time between wettings and to work out how long children were able to 'hold on' to urine from one episode to the next.

Disposable nappies, on the other hand, mask the feelings of wetness. Most children are happy to continue to wear a wet disposable nappy because they still feel dry.

Getting prepared

Parents need to prepare for the occasional accidents during toilet learning.

Children will have accidents during the learning phase and parents will need to have cleaning products on hand (such as a mop and bucket and changes of clothes), dress their children in suitable clothing and encourage them to play in areas of the house where it is easier to clean up, for example a non-carpeted area.

Learning toileting skills involves lots of practise on the toilet. Parents should make sure that their toilet is a safe environment for their child.

[See Parent Notes Introduction page 8 for tips on how to prepare.](#)

Summary of Supplementary Parent Notes

Introduction

The facilitator's role is to introduce parents to the Signposts program - the generic material and the supplementary toilet learning material - and teach them how to use these resources together. Parents will use the Signposts program to develop their children's toileting skills.

Module 1

Measuring your child's behaviour

Teaches parents to describe, measure and record their child's current toileting behaviour. Parents will identify their child's current toileting skills, make use of a wetness indicator, and record their child's toileting behaviour on a Pants Check sheet.

Module 2

Systematic use of daily interactions

Focuses on using daily interactions to foster appropriate toileting behaviours and not support inappropriate behaviours.

Parents will explore triggers and consequences (e.g. the consequences of nappy changes in the child's bedroom or lounge room) and their impact on difficult behaviour.

The skills used in toilet learning are broken down to assist parents to recognise the complexity of this skill and to systematically plan for the development of their child's skills.

Parents are encouraged to give their children more toileting opportunities to further develop their skills.

Parents are advised to carry out nappy changes in the toilet or bathroom so that children can associate what the toilet is used for.

Toilet rules are established and equipment needs to be considered, such as toilet seats and steps to make toileting easier for the child.

Parents will learn how to provide their child with clear instructions on toileting.

Module 3

Replacing difficult behaviour with useful behaviour

Module 3 helps parents to replace difficult behaviour with useful behaviour.

Since the general aim is for children to pass urine in the toilet and not in their nappies/pull-ups, passing urine into nappies or somewhere other than the toilet is considered difficult behaviour.

Module 3 helps parents identify some of the possible reasons why their child may not yet have learned to use the toilet. (Many children pass urine in a nappy as a preferred activity because it is easier and doesn't interfere with other activities such as playing.)

To encourage children to use the toilet it is recommended that parents use planned ignoring when changing nappies.

Parents are encouraged to continue to provide their child with toileting opportunities and record toileting habits on the Pants Check sheet.

Module 4

Planning for better behaviour

In Module 4 parents will focus on routines and planning for those occasions when difficult behaviour is most likely to occur.

Parents will develop a Toileting Opportunities sheet using the data collected from the Pants Check sheet and their family's daily routines.

With this information, a personalised Toileting Opportunities chart will be implemented that provides the children with at least five toileting opportunities throughout the day. These times will reflect the child's current wetting/toileting habits and the family's daily routine.

Parents will use a planned activity routine to provide their child with toileting opportunities.

Module 5

Developing more skills in your child

This module continues to build on toilet learning skills. Parents are encouraged to have written objectives while

continuing to provide their child with the planned toileting opportunities.

Parents will learn about different methods of teaching: teaching by showing and step-by-step teaching.

Module 5 encourages parents to work with their child's school when developing a toilet learning plan.

Dealing with stress in your family

There are no supplementary parent notes for *Dealing with stress in your family*. Continue to use the generic Signposts program module to help parents deal with these issues. This module helps parents identify what stresses them and ways to manage stress so that they are able to make best use of the program.

Your family as a team

There are no supplementary parent notes for *Your family as a team*. Continue to use the generic Signposts program module to help parents think about these issues. This module helps parents think about how to work as a team and support one another as they make changes in the ways they are managing their child's difficult behaviour.

Resources

Introduces parents to valuable resources and services which may enhance their program.

Module 1

Measuring your child's behaviour

Introduction

As adults we are so accustomed to going to the toilet that many parents forget that it is a set of skills that needs to be taught to their child. In Module 1 parents learn how to describe and measure their child's current toileting skills.

Many children who have difficulties with toileting skills may not have been given opportunities to learn the skills or have developed difficult behaviour to avoid toileting. Parents are encouraged to give their children toileting opportunities. These opportunities may be different for each child due to their different skill levels. Some children may have learnt a number of skills, but not all of the skills required for successful toilet use.

Telephone test

Parents learn to use the ‘telephone test’ to describe their child’s behaviour when the child attends the toilet. If parents have not been able to get their child to the toilet, encourage them to describe their child’s behaviour when they either take or ask their child to attend the toilet.

Instructions for the telephone test are also included in Parent Notes Module 1.

Action Plan

Parents will begin their toileting action plan by recording their description of the difficult behaviour and how they plan to measure it. Parents are encouraged to use the template in workbook H-1 – Action plan – to list all the things they have decided to do to develop a toilet learning action plan. The Parent Resources provides an example of a plan specific to the skills of toilet learning.

Measuring behaviours – Pants Check

In Module 1 parents use the Pants Check sheet to measure how often a child passes urine each day. It is recommended that a wetness indicator be placed inside pull-ups/nappies.

Encourage parents to measure their child's toileting behaviour for 5–7 days. As when measuring any behaviours, the more data obtained, the better the information.

The Pants Check sheet is broken up into hourly time slots. Parents need to complete the pants check quickly and quietly. If children are already wearing underwear they should continue to do so.

Recording bowel motions

Parents who want to teach their child toileting skills centred on bowel motions can rely on smell as an indicator. Every bowel motion must be recorded on the Pants check sheet. If children are wearing underwear they should continue to do so.

Module 2

Systematic use of daily interaction

Identifying the skill strengths of the child

In Module 2 parents identify the skill strengths of their child that can be used to further develop their toilet skills. Parents can be encouraged to consider existing skills that are not currently demonstrated during toileting efforts.

Encourage parents to break down the overall toileting skill into smaller skills. Refer parents to the Toileting Skills list from Module 1 (page 8). Encourage parents to add any other skills that are relevant for their child.

‘User-friendly’ activities and material

Parents are encouraged to think of ways of making activities more user-friendly for their child. Because each child has different skill levels and physical attributes this will vary between individuals. Parents who have already attempted toilet learning in the past or who have older children may be aware of aids that can be of assistance.

Encourage a group discussion regarding aids – many parents will be keen to share stories and information about suitable products (and the best place to purchase them).

Ask parents to think about their child's clothing. They should dress their child in clothing that can easily be pulled up and down, for example, pants with an elastic waist and shoes that can be easily removed. Girls may have difficulty lifting up their skirt to sit onto the toilet. Some children may have difficulty with long tops or t-shirts.

Remind parents not to dress their child in their 'best' clothes during toilet learning and to ensure that they have a suitable range of clothing changes available if they intend to remove nappies altogether.

As adults we don't put too much thought into the toilet environment, but some children find the environment in the toilet room, such as the smell or temperature, very different from the rest of the house.

See Parent Notes Module 2 page 5 for ideas on how to make the toilet environment comfortable.

Triggers and consequences

Module 2 teaches parents to identify and understand the effects of triggers and consequences on behaviour.

Sometimes the trigger for difficult toileting behaviour is simply being instructed to attend the toilet. Some children use their nappy as a 'portable toilet' and are more than happy to pass urine in their nappy and continue to go about their business. This is more convenient than attending the toilet.

Difficult behaviour may be triggered by the timing of the instruction, especially when children are involved in a preferred activity. A common positive consequence for difficult behaviour when asked to go to the toilet is that the parent will give in and allow the child to use a nappy instead.

See Parent Notes Module 2 page 7.

Change time

Ask parents to think about where they change their child's nappies. Many parents change the nappy on the child's bed or on the lounge room floor in front of the TV. This can send mixed signals to children about where toileting activity should occur.

Remind parents to make nappy changes as boring as possible and make toileting a more enjoyable experience. For example a tickle may be a reward for sitting on the toilet or a game of tag could also be considered a reward when the child has completed the toilet learning task.

Encourage parents to change nappies in the toilet or bathroom with children participating in flushing waste. This will help the child to recognise the relationship between passing urine and bowel motions with the toilet. It will also help the child become familiar with where the toilet is in the house and how to get there.

If parents wish to continue to change their child in places other than the toilet, encourage them to do so with limited interaction (quick and silent).

[See Parent Notes Module 2 page 7.](#)

Use of nappies/pull-ups

Many parents feel that their child has made some progress if they have moved from nappies to pull-ups. Unless the parent is using the pull-up so that they can provide their child with more toileting opportunities, there is actually little difference.

Children consider both nappies and pull-ups to be a portable toilet and will use them as such.

There is no doubt that using underpants or training pants instead of nappies or pull-ups assists with toilet learning. With underpants, children no longer have a 'portable toilet' and when they urinate they are able to feel what it is like to be wet.

Household toileting rules

Toilet rules are used by the family in the same way as other household rules. Toilet learning 'Do' rules may include:

- » Child to wash hands with assistance from an adult.
- » Child to flush toilet after passing a bowel motion into the toilet.
- » Child to be given an opportunity to practise using the toilet during nappy changing.

It is not necessary to have any toilet 'Don't' rules in the learning phase.

Module 3

Replacing difficult behaviour with useful behaviour

Introduction

Parents may be frustrated that their child is demonstrating some toileting skills but not passing urine in the toilet. If this is the case, encourage them to focus on the skills that their child has learnt and explain that – like all new tasks – their children need lots of learning opportunities to feel comfortable with demonstrating these skills.

Skills review

The objective of all the modules is for children to demonstrate their toilet learning skills, but not necessarily pass urine into the toilet. By Module 3 some children may be demonstrating a number of toileting skills (e.g. sitting on the toilet) but not necessarily passing urine into the toilet.

Remind parents that skills such as cooperating with requests to attend the toilet, wiping, flushing and hand-washing all contribute to their child's independence. The more practise the child has, the more likely they will feel comfortable enough to pass urine in the toilet.

Reasons for difficult behaviours

In this module you can help parents to identify possible reasons for their child's difficult toileting behaviour. Some of the reasons for difficult behaviours include:

- » engaging in a preferred activity
- » escaping from a task
- » obtaining physical pleasure
- » escaping pain experienced during bowel motions.

See Parent Notes Module 3 page 2 for more detail on reasons for difficult behaviours.

Encouraging alternative behaviour

When teaching children toileting skills, the alternative behaviour to passing urine into a nappy would be passing urine into the toilet. There are many smaller skills required to reach that final goal. Strategies used to encourage alternative behaviour include:

- » ensuring no consequences for difficult behaviour
- » providing negative consequences for difficult behaviour
- » taking away privileges.

See Parent Notes Module 3 page 4 for more detail on encouraging alternative behaviour.

Toileting in different environments

As discussed throughout the modules, toileting can be a complicated skill. Children can demonstrate the skill in some environments and not others. For example, children may feel comfortable using the toilet in a familiar environment such as home or school but unsure in places such as shopping centres or when visiting friends' homes. Children may not know where the toilet is or how to get to it. They may also feel uncomfortable if they don't have the toilet aids that they use at home or school. Public toilets may also overwhelm some children as the environment is often very noisy and busy.

To assist parents to overcome possible problems such as these, they could be advised to include visits to toilets at friends, families and also public places as part of the toilet learning process. Initially, they should allow the child to visit the toilet without the expectation of passing urine. As the child begins to feel comfortable, then slowly start to encourage children to sit on the toilet.

Module 4

Planning for better behaviour

Skills review

Some parents will be seeing good progress having followed strategies from the previous modules, while others might be finding that effective toileting is a difficult task for their child. Encourage parents to continue, emphasising that all children learn at different rates, and ask parents to reflect on the skills that their child has developed since starting toilet learning.

Planning daily routines

Module 4 helps parents to develop daily routines and planned activities routines.

At this point parents will need to look at the information they have been recording on their Pants Check sheet as well as their daily family routine. Some parents will be able to identify patterns in their child's toileting habits (e.g. certain times of the day, after meals or after a sleep). Other parents may find it difficult to see a clear pattern.

Suggest that parents look at their family daily routine to see how a toileting routine might fit. With these in mind, parents can start planned toileting routines.

Parents need to provide their child with five toileting opportunities each day.

[See Parent Notes Module 4 page 2 for more detail.](#)

Planning for high-risk times

Module 4 also encourages parents to work out a plan for toileting in high-risk situations (e.g. long journeys).

A word of encouragement

Remind parents that toilet learning can be a stressful activity and it may take some before they achieve the desired result. Refer them to the modules *Dealing with Stress in the Family* and *Your Family as Team* if appropriate.

Parents are encouraged to go through the following steps to help them plan for high-risk times:

1. Identify a particular high-risk situation for child.
2. Select interesting activities for child to engage in during this situation.
3. Decide on behaviour expected from child during this situation.
4. Decide on the behaviour not wanted from child in this situation.
5. Select positive consequences that will engage child in desired behaviour.
6. Select negative consequences when child engages in prohibited behaviour.
7. Consider practising planned activities routine in a lower risk situation.

See Parent Notes Module 4 page 3 for more detail.

Implementing your planned toileting routine

Parents will develop a plan to implement their planned toilet routine. This will include the following steps:

1. Prepare in advance.
2. Talk to child about rules.
3. Complete the activities associated with the high-risk situation.
4. Hold a follow-up discussion with child.
5. Refine and review your planned activities routine.

If a child is consolidating toileting skills and the parent is keen for a challenge, a second planned activities routine can be developed.

[See Parent Notes Module 4 page 4 for more detail.](#)

Planned activities monitoring form

Parents will use the Planned Activities Monitoring Form (from parent workbook D-5) to help them keep track of the steps they take when providing their child with toileting opportunities.

Module 5

Developing more skills in your child

Developing new skills

Parents may have discovered that their child has mastered some of the skills needed to attend the toilet, and now want to move on to new toileting skills.

Have parents break skills into parts and to write objectives for the toileting skills that they wish to teach their children.

See Parent Notes Module 5 page 5 for an example.

Writing objectives

When writing objectives for the skill of attending the toilet, parents should include:

1. A description of the skill to be learned.
2. A statement of the conditions under which the child will use the skill.
3. A statement of how well the child will use the skill.

See Parent Notes Module 5 page 3 for examples.

Ways of teaching skills

See Parent Notes Module 5 page 7 for more detail.

Teaching by showing

Parents are encouraged to allow their child to observe them use the toilet. Many children may have not seen the toilet in operation. Parents may have discouraged their child to go near the toilet for hygiene reasons, or been concerned that the child will touch the toilet bowl or play in the water.

Step-by-step teaching

Parents are advised to use the Toileting Skills list (Parent Notes Module 1 page 8) to help them break down the toilet skills into steps.

The child at school

See Parent Notes Module 5 page 8 for more detail.

Encourage parents to communicate with their child's school, kindergarten or child care. Parents may be able to offer schools strategies that work at home, and may also want to negotiate about habits such as wearing pull-ups on the bus trip home.

Most learning centres will be keen to teach toilet skills to their students and will have a set toileting routine. If children are making good progress at school but are having difficulty learning toileting skills at home it would be valuable for parents to attend school and observe the routine.

Advise parents to provide their child with toileting opportunities over the weekends and school holidays. This will assist children to understand that toileting is a skill they will use in many places as well as school.

Resources

Signposts for building better behaviour works well as a toilet training tool. In addition to this material, continence services across Australia can provide other resources (books, handouts and DVDs) that can enhance your understanding of continence and toilet training. These services are also useful for parents.

The Parent Resources include contact details for these services, as well as:

- » Getting prepared
- » Toilet learning book
- » Sample Action Plan
- » Toileting Skills
- » Pants Check
- » Toileting Opportunities
- » Stickers

See [Parent Resources](#) for more details.

Acknowledgements and Contributors

Acknowledgements

Signposts for building better behaviour is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (previously the Department of Human Services).

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