

Toileting *guide*.

Toileting can be a complex daily task with many steps. Some children may need more time, support, or a different approach to develop independence. This is not about effort or willingness. It reflects differences in how children learn, plan actions, process information, and manage everyday routines.

01 | Understanding your child's experience

When a child is finding toileting difficult, there are often underlying reasons. These are some of the factors an occupational therapist may consider when understanding what could be going on for your child.

Inner body signals (interoception)

Some children learn body signals differently. They may:

- Notice the need to toilet very late
- Be unsure what the body signal is or means
- Become so focused on a preferred activity that body signals are easy to miss

This is a difference in how they learn and interpret body signals, not a behaviour choice.

Differences in motor skills

- Have difficulty with postural control
- Feel off balance on a seat with a hole, where their feet can't touch the floor
- Find it hard to scrunch toilet paper, apply enough pressure to wipe, or shift weight through the hips to reach behind and wipe

Executive functioning differences

Executive functioning supports starting, sequencing, and completing tasks. Toileting is not a single action. It is many small steps: noticing the signal, stopping an activity, going to the bathroom, managing clothing, waiting, wiping, flushing, and washing hands. Each of those steps can be broken down further, which is a lot to manage.

Children may:

- Stay deeply engaged in activities and find it hard to transition
- Have difficulty starting the toileting routine

- Forget or skip steps
- Need extra time to figure out what comes next
- Feel overwhelmed by the number of steps involved

Effort and interest

If toileting feels effortful, unfamiliar, or less engaging than other activities, children may naturally avoid or delay it.

02 | Medical considerations

It is important to check for medical factors that may impact toileting, such as

- Constipation
- Urinary tract infections

A GP can help rule these out or address medical challenges.

03 | Ways that may support your child

Create predictable routines

Build toileting into the day rather than relying on body signals alone

- Before leaving the house
- Before or after meals
- Before bed

Consistency reduces the need for decision making in the moment.

Support your child to notice their body signals

Help your child learn over time. You can narrate your own body sensations, talk about textures or temperatures during the day, or name what you notice for your child. It's ok to use real words for body parts, like vagina and penis, this will support learning. "I wonder if your bladder feels full or tight?" "Your body is moving a lot, is it telling you that you need to wee?"

Keep language neutral and curious.

Break the task into clear steps

Support task initiation and sequencing by

- Using visual schedules or pictures of steps
- Keeping steps consistent across home and school environments
- Verbal prompts for each step

This helps reduce overwhelm and builds clarity.

Use a graded learning approach

Learning toileting skills takes time, especially for children with motor planning and executive functioning differences.

A graded approach might include

- Supporting most steps at the beginning, and slowly reducing support as your child becomes more confident
- Practising specific parts of the routine such as clothing management or hand washing
- Repeating routines in a consistent way

Progress may not be linear, and that's very normal. Small steps still matter.

Support transitions

Help your child move from activities to toileting

- Give advance notice such as "2 more minutes, then toilet"
- Use timers or visual cues
- Reassure them they can return to what they were doing

Make the environment supportive

Small changes can help:

- Foot stool for stability and posture
- Easy to manage clothing
- Visual supports in the bathroom
- Optional fidgets, sensory foot pads, bubbles (to help push), or calming items while sitting

Keep your approach calm and supportive

Focus on working together rather than control

- Avoid pressure or shame
- Acknowledge effort and small wins
- Keeping experiences positive will help your child try again next time, it's ok if they don't wee or poo every time they try to toilet

Children learn best when they feel safe and supported.

04 | When extra support can help

If your child would benefit from more support, an occupational therapist can help with:

- Body awareness
- Motor skills
- Executive functioning strategies
- Environmental considerations
- Building routines and visual supports
- Using graded approaches to support independence

When working on toileting skills, it is a joint effort between parents and children. At OT with Tamsyn, this looks like regular parent check-ins, coaching to figure out what works for your child and family routines, as well as intervention tailored to your child's needs.

● IMPORTANT TO NOTE

It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of factors that may influence toileting. Every child is unique. Other physical, sensory, cognitive, environmental, or emotional factors may also play a part. Occupational therapists consider the whole child and their environment, and can support in a range of other areas that affect participation in toileting and daily routines.