Considerations for Toileting and Potty Training at School

Always follow your school or district policies and procedures. This resource is intended to provide considerations regarding toileting and potty training in the school setting.

Rules/Regulations/Guidelines

- There are no rules/regulations that require students to be potty trained to attend school. Many students through the age of 21 attend public school and require diapering.
    - If a student requires help with toileting to attend school, the school will want to consider obligations around FAPE
- The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Rules and Regulations Governing Schools in the State of Colorado addresses diapering and toileting in schools.
    - The rule assumes there will be children attending schools who need support with toileting
    - CDPHE's health rules outline the requirements related to toileting/diapering
- For exclusion guidelines refer to CDPHE How Sick Is Too Sick
- CDPHE Infectious Disease Guidelines
    - Diaper Changing & Toileting
    - Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfection recommendations

Who Toilets or Diapers in Schools

- Toileting/diapering falls into the category of "activities of daily living"
- Unless the toileting issue is related to a chronic health condition or infectious disease, it is not considered a nursing task that nurses must "delegate"
    - Nurses can train others on how to perform these tasks using proper hygiene techniques
    - Nurses can help schools review and apply the CDPHE Rules on diapering and toileting
    - If the student has a chronic health condition or infectious disease, it would be something that the nurse would generally case manage
- Some schools struggle with trying to identify "whose role it is" to manage toileting in schools
    - Here are some considerations:
        - Who is available?
        - Who is the student comfortable with?
        - Does it require 2 adults? – there are no rules around this
        - Is there an appropriate location?

Developmental Considerations

- While most children are fully potty trained by the age of 5 or 6, it may take some children longer to master this
- Developing a plan of care collaboratively with the parent, student, school nurse, and health care provider if appropriate, can be helpful
- Potty training is generally more successful if the same general plan is implemented at home and school
- If the student has not been evaluated by a health care provider, a referral may be considered if there are concerns about medical/psychological issues interfering with potty training success

Social Emotional Considerations

- It is essential that each child is treated as an individual and care is given as gently and respectfully as possible.
- Considerations from The State Education Department - New York:
    - All students deserve a warm and safe environment that creates a sense of belonging and connectedness and helps students to feel supported. Toileting accidents can be a source of embarrassment and distress to a child, especially when a trusted adult or peer reacts in an insensitive way. How an adult or peer reacts can significantly impact the child's social- emotional health, self-esteem, as well as interest in learning. Being proactive is key. Toileting is a skill to be taught and mastered over time and incorporating the following best practices can assist in planning and fostering children's independence.
    - Involve the child's family in developing a toileting plan to build skills. This plan should include common vocabulary words and a consistent routine that is both culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate to be used both in the home and at school.
        - If your school bills Medicaid check with your Medicaid coordinator to see what needs to be included in your plan.
    - Build bathroom times into the daily schedule to establish a consistent routine, while also allowing children to access the bathroom as needed.
    - School personnel should frequently check in with children who are being toilet trained (e.g., arrival time, before/after snack, and meals, transitioning between activities, etc.) rather than depending on them to tell the adult. This will remind the child to use the toilet facilities before an accident occurs.
    - Read books and incorporate toileting picture books into the classroom library and centers where appropriate (e.g., dramatic play, science areas).
    - Ensure that each child has one or more sets of extra clothes available. Parents may need to be reminded to send in a replacement set of clothing each time that the child has a toileting accident.
    - Be encouraging to the child. When there is an accident, have a private conversation with the child reassuring them that they may use the bathroom any time the need arises and remind them of the toileting plan in a positive manner.
    - Have a plan and protocol in place for changing the child in private when there is an accident so as not to disrupt the classroom routine (e.g., an adult staff member directly supervises the children from the bathroom doorway where they are able to enter the restroom quickly to provide assistance).
    - Stay calm and positive. Children are sensitive to other's reactions to their behavior.
    - Provide positive praise and support for the child's efforts.

Additional Resources

- CDE| Toileting and Special Needs
- CDE | School Nursing and Health Legal
- CDE | Individual Healthcare Plan