

Supporting Students with Toileting Needs

A Guide for School Leaders and Educators

Purpose of the Guidance

Students come to school with a variety of strengths and needs. In recent years, schools have seen an increase in the number of students who need toileting support because they are not yet independent in recognizing or responding to their biological toileting needs. A student's independent use of the restroom is not an appropriate factor to consider when determining readiness for school. This guide is intended to help school leaders and educators support students as they learn this critical self-care skill.

This guidance explains how schools can support students who are not yet independent with toileting while maintaining access to instruction, using individualized planning, family collaboration, health and safety considerations, and positive reinforcement.

Toileting Considerations When Supporting Students

Independent use of the restroom is dependent on a wide range of biological, developmental, and social factors. In Tennessee, the ability to independently use the toilet is not a criterion for school admission. Therefore, schools will need a plan to support students who are not yet independent.

When a student is identified as needing toileting support, the school should consider the following.

- Meet with the parents to understand the process used at home to support toileting independence, including what has worked and not worked when reinforcing the preferred behavior.
- Request relevant medical information that may help explain delays in toileting, and, when appropriate, seek parent approval through a release of information (ROI) to speak with the student's medical provider.

- Consult with the school or district nurse and behavior analyst to establish a safety protocol and process for teaching independence.
- Create a toileting support plan or individualized healthcare plan (IHP), depending on the cause(s) of the student's need for support. The plan should identify a point person who will monitor its effectiveness.
- Consult the toileting resources available on the [Low Incidence webpage](#).

Develop a support plan that integrates positive reinforcement, consistent routines, and strategies for increasing independence. Considerations to increase student success may include:

- scheduled bathroom breaks with an alarm or timer to ensure consistency,
- reinforcement plan for maintaining clean and dry pants using preferred reinforcers,
- access to a bathroom that is close enough to where the student is at each portion of the day to minimize disruption to instruction,
- a protocol for addressing bathroom accidents, including clean-up and reporting to parents,
- data collection/progress monitoring, and
- regular check-ins to analyze the data and determine if the plan is increasing independence.

Positive Reinforcement Reminder

It is important to reinforce student learning, especially when the skill is exceptionally difficult for the student. Creating a positive experience can help reduce frustration or refusal. Reinforcement should be provided for performance of the target behavior. In toileting support, staff are teaching the student to use the toilet correctly and maintain clean, dry pants. Reinforcement should therefore focus on staying clean and dry, not only on using the toilet. Reinforcement may also be provided for urinating or defecating in the toilet, but the primary focus should remain on staying clean and dry.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can a school deny admission to a student until they independently use the toilet?

No, independent toilet use should not be a requirement for school admission. Schools can provide resources and information to families to assist with toilet training at home. Providing these resources before a student enrolls can help reduce the number of students needing support at school.

What can toileting support at school consist of?

Toileting support at school can range from reminding a student to use the toilet, assisting with diapering, helping with clothing, supporting clean-up after an accident, cleaning a student who is soiled or wet, following a toileting schedule, or addressing bowel or bladder incontinence.

Should a student be referred for a special education evaluation if they are not independently using the toilet?

Not necessarily. There are many reasons why a student may not have achieved toileting independence or may require continued periodic support. The team should review available data to determine whether there is reason to suspect a disability before referring the student for a special education evaluation.

Is an individualized education program (IEP) required to support a student with toileting needs?

No, an IEP is not required to support a student's toileting needs. For students who are not eligible for an IEP but are struggling with toileting independence, the team should determine whether a medical condition or physical limitation may be impacting the student. Information may be included in a behavior plan, IHP, or Section 504 Plan, as appropriate. An IHP may be considered when medical needs related to toileting require nursing interventions during the school day. However, when a student is currently eligible for special education and one impact of the disability is that the student is not independently using the restroom, the IEP team

should consider whether a toileting-related goal is needed, even if there is no medical diagnosis or physical condition preventing independence.

Is there a specific staff person certified to support toileting?

No, toileting support does not require a specific certification. Schools retain discretion to determine which staff are most appropriate to support students with toileting needs, and this responsibility should be shared to support student access and dignity. Toileting responsibilities may be included in staff job descriptions and district policies and procedures to foster a supportive environment for students who need assistance. Consulting with the school nurse and/or behavior specialist can help staff develop and implement a plan that supports the student's independence. Toileting support is not required to be performed by a nurse, and school nurses should not be routinely used for changing diapers or assisting with toileting. School nurses may assist but may not be available for daily support because they perform many other nursing tasks and must be available for emergencies or health needs. Paraeducators may support toileting, but their work should be under the supervision of a certified staff member. Any staff member supporting toileting should be trained by the school nurse, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and/or another appropriate individual trained to implement specific strategies with the student.

Can we ask the parents to come to school and change their child when the student has a bathroom accident?

No, the school should not rely on a parent to provide daily toileting support. As with other self-care and social skills, such as reminding students to wash their hands, blow their nose, or cough into their elbow, the school should support the student while minimizing disruption to learning. Relying on a parent is inappropriate and may result in extended time away from instruction while the parent navigates work responsibilities and travel to the school.

Conclusion

Becoming independent in the restroom is a critical self-care skill for all students. The strategies in this guide are designed to help school staff address the increasing

number of students requiring toileting support. While some students may have a medical or physical condition that impacts toileting success, many students can become independent when provided with consistent, individualized support. Independence with toileting is not a requirement for school admission. Providing families of young children with information and home strategies can reduce the number of students who need toileting support in the future.

Additional training and resources can be found on the following webpages:

- [TDOE Low Incidence webpage](#)
- [Vanderbilt Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders \(TRIAD\) online resources and training](#)