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Parenting Tips: Toddlers

Together, we'll know what to do.



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Responsive Parenting

Learning how to care for and nurture your child to provide them with a lifetime of positive benefits takes commitment, effort, support and some humour. But you don't have to learn it all on your own. We're here to partner with you.

Responsive parenting involves tuning in to your child's social, emotional and physical needs. You are parenting responsively when you act promptly and match your actions to what your child is trying to communicate to you.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Each parent brings their own experiences, values beliefs about family life and parenting.
- It takes time to become confident in parenting.
- The early relationship you form with your child sets them up for life in terms of brain development and future relationship skills.

REALITIES

All families experience rough waters sometimes.
For example:

- Financial pressures or adjustments.
- Communication and relationship breakdown between parents.
- High expectations of yourself, child or partner.
- Isolation.
- Poor sleep.

SAFETY

Seek help if:

- You are finding it hard to understand your baby's cues.
- You aren't coping with parenting, or there is ongoing conflict as you try to co-parent.
- You are finding it difficult as a parent to navigate life's storms.



PARENTING TIPS

- Parenting is about trying your best, not perfection.
- Healthy eating, sunshine, fresh air, time with friends and relaxing is good for everyone.
- Learn to read your child's verbal and non-verbal cues to respond appropriately to their needs.
- Accept that you may occasionally misread your child's cues.
- Explore what kind of family you want to be by defining your goals, beliefs and values.
- Develop family traditions, share responsibilities, and make time for fun.
- Be open to advice, but remember every family is unique. What works for one doesn't always work for another.
- Maintain friendships while making new social connections through parenting groups and supports.
- If you are starting a new parenting partnership with your partner, you'll need to negotiate how you're going to parent together as a team.
- Respectful and clear communication is key for couples, remembering that you are both learning to manage the changes in your life.
- Tell your partner how you are feeling and listen to your partner. It's important to share how you're both feeling.
- Accept help and ask for support when needed.

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Feeding



From 12 months of age, toddlers should eat family meals. Offer a range of nutritious foods from the five food groups recommended by the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Be guided by your child – don't force them to eat if they aren't hungry, and don't withhold healthy food when they are.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Many toddlers can be fussy eaters. Factors that can affect your toddler's appetite include activity levels, sleeping patterns and health.
- As long as your toddler is active, well and eating a variety of healthy foods, there is no reason for concern.
- This is a time of exploration and learning for your toddler, so expect some mess and use surfaces that are easy to clean.

REALITIES

- There may be times your toddler will eat foods, and then refuse the same foods the next day.
- It may take many tries before they will accept new foods.
- It's common for toddlers to throw food. They may be testing your reactions.
- This is a time for experimenting with the feel and smell of food, or what sound it makes when dropped. Some toddlers can drag out mealtime.

MEALTIME TIPS

- Let your toddler know ahead of time that the meal will be ready soon.
- Sit down together when eating, preferably at a table with the family. Mealtimes provide an opportunity to be with your child and role model positive eating habits.
- Try to keep mealtimes regular and predictable.
- Make your toddler's evening meal early to avoid being over tired.
- Involve your toddler in preparing their meals.
- Encourage your toddler to taste new foods by offering their favourites in combination with new foods.
- Allow time for your toddler to touch and smell their food.
- Praise your child for trying new foods, eating finger foods, using a spoon or waiting their turn.
- Reduce distractions like television and electronic devices.
- Try to limit their eating time to 30 minutes in order to establish a routine.
- Avoid take away or pre-packaged foods that contain high levels of salt and fat.
- Avoid using sweets or chocolate as rewards.
- Toddler milks are not required.
- Avoid large amounts of milk, juice and cordial as this will fill them up, and affect their appetite.

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Understanding Sleep

Quality sleep is important for growth and development, so it's important to assist your toddler in achieving good sleep habits. Responding to your toddler consistently and sensitively can improve sleep quality and duration.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Early wake up times. Putting your toddler to bed later at night won't normally help – they will wake up feeling tired.
- Sleeping through the night more often. Disturbed sleeping may still occur.
- Delaying tactics prior to going to bed like wanting a drink, a cuddle or one more story.
- Frequently getting out of bed or asking you to stay with them.
- Your toddler may be afraid of the dark or being alone.
- Some toddlers have night terrors where they scream out and appear awake, but they may still be asleep. Don't try to wake them – help them resettle back to sleep calmly.

REALITIES

Toddlers are often full of energy, so they may avoid staying in bed. These steps can help:

- Reassure your toddler by saying, " It's ok, it's time for sleep", while in the room or sitting on their bed briefly.
- Go to the door and once again reassure your toddler.
- If your toddler is distressed, offer a cuddle and then once calm, go back to the door and reassure them.
- If your toddler gets out of bed, you will need to take them back to bed every time. Calmly repeat steps 1 to 3 (you may need to repeat several times).
- This can feel frustrating, but the more your toddler gets used to this routine the more successful it will be.

TIRED SIGNS

Look for signs of tiredness in your toddler. For example:

- Yawning.
- Grizzling or whining.
- Clinginess.
- Clumsiness.
- Becoming bored with playing or toys.

SAFETY

When your child outgrows their cot (when their shoulders are higher than the cot sides or they are climbing out), it's time to transition to a bed. Add bed rails or cushions on the floor next to the bed while adjusting to the change.



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TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

- Toddlers respond well to routine and predictability. It helps them feel safe and understand what is coming next.
- Give your toddler lots of opportunities to play each day and exposure to natural light (always be sun safe).
- It can take time to adjust to a new routine, so be patient, calm and responsive.
- Create routines around sleep time, like a bath, quiet time or reading a book.
- Avoid active games and screen time close to bedtime.
- Let your toddler know when it's almost time for bed.
- Make bedtime about the same time every night.
- A dim night light may help your toddler if they're afraid of the dark.
- Put your toddler in bed calmly, kiss them goodnight and let them know you are close by.

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Routines

Every home is unique, so there's no one-size-fits-all approach to developing routines. Consider what's appropriate for the age of your toddler and what works best in your home.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Anything you do consistently can be considered a routine.
- Routines provide structure and predictability, which can make a toddler feel safe and help them to calm and regulate emotions.
- Anything can disrupt a routine, such as holidays or illness. During these times, your toddler may be unsettled and need extra comfort and support.

REALITIES

At times your toddler may not want to cooperate. When this occurs, these steps might help:

- Stop and calmly get down to your toddler's eye level to get their attention.
- Take time to understand what your toddler needs – offer a hug or help if required.
- Slow down and calmly help your toddler transition into the next part of the day.

TIPS FOR ROUTINE DEVELOPMENT

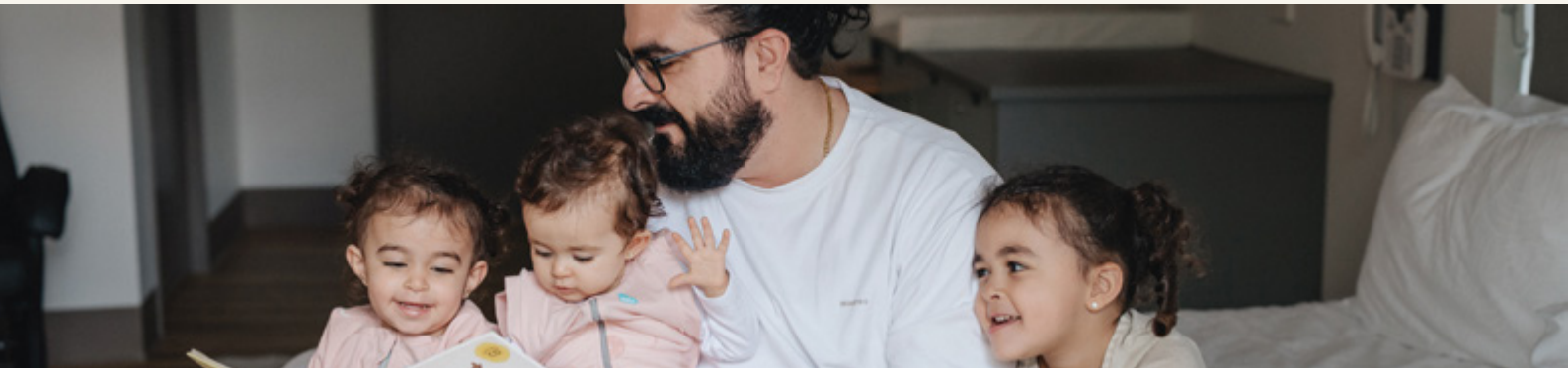
- Set realistic expectations of your children and of yourself and be patient.
- Spend quality time with your toddler every day.
- Do the same things at similar times every day.
- Toddlers respond well when they know what is coming next. Try saying things like, "It's almost bath time", or "We're going to pack away our toys and have our bath".

During the day, you should:

- Make regular times for snacks and meals.
- Allow lots of time for play and exploration.
- Make regular times for naps or quiet play.

When preparing for sleep, try:

- Quiet time.
- Regular routines, like a bath and reading a book before bed.
- A regular time for bed (see sleep section for more tips).



FLEXIBLE DAILY ROUTINE – FOLLOWING FEED, PLAY, SLEEP CYCLE

- Variations may be needed to meet your child's needs.

AGE	FEED-PLAY TIME	SLEEP / REST TIME	AVERAGE NUMBER OF SLEEPS & FEEDS
12 - 18 months.	3 - 4 hours.	1 - 3 hours.	1 sleep. Family meals.
18 - 36 months.	5 hours.	1 - 2 hours.	1 Sleep or quiet time. Family meals.
3 - 5 years.	Up for most of the day.	Encourage quiet time.	13 hours of rest in a 24 hour period. Family meals.

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Development

Being a toddler is an exciting time, with so much to learn and explore. It's a time of change, when your child learns many new skills. As parents and carers, you have a great influence on the development of your toddler. Remember – each child is unique and will develop at their own pace.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Your toddler will develop many new skills as they grow. Some of these include:

- Language and communication skills – by 3 years old, your toddler may speak 3 to 4 word sentences and understand simple instructions.
- Gross motor skills – such as running, jumping, hopping, climbing, and learning to ride a tricycle or scooter.
- Problem solving – solving simple puzzles, using push and pull objects, and playing with toys with buttons and levers.
- Social and emotional development – managing their emotions and how to play with others.
- Fine motor skills – for example holding a pencil, painting, using scissors and building with blocks.

REALITIES

Screen use

- It is recommended children 2 to 5 years old have no more than 1 hour of screen time per day (including television, tablets or smart phones).
- If your toddler is using screens, choose high quality programs and apps that have an educational component and stay with your child to ensure they are cyber safe.

SAFETY

Always make sure you keep your child's environment safe and monitor screen use.



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TIPS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

- Children learn through playing and interacting with people. Ensure your toddler has lots of opportunities to play and explore.
- Join in and play with your toddler each day with toys that promote imaginative play, such as blocks, toy animals, cooking sets, cars and trains.
- Play outside.
- Join a playgroup where your toddler can learn to play and share with others.
- Have art supplies such as crayons/pencils/paint available for your child.
- Try new activities – practice builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Read to your toddler every day – this helps with language development.
- Talk to your toddler about what is happening around them. Describing what you see helps with language development.

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Connecting with your Toddler

As a parent of a toddler, you are on a journey to explore the world through your toddler's eyes. Having a secure relationship is important. You can achieve this by being consistently attentive and sensitive to their needs. As your toddler becomes independent, they will watch and learn from how you react and respond to the world around you.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Toddlers have big emotions and often express them.
- Toddlers want to be independent.
- Toddlers can be stubborn and want their own way.
- Toddlers' moods can escalate quickly as they learn how to manage emotions.
- Toddlers need your help, but may not always be willing to accept your guidance.
- Toddlers can use the word 'no' even though they mean 'yes'.
- Toddlers can show aggression when they are frustrated or anxious.

REALITIES

- It can be difficult to balance family and other commitments, and to find time to connect with your toddler.
- Toddlers are still developing their communication skills.
- Toddlers' emotions can be big and overwhelming.

SAFETY

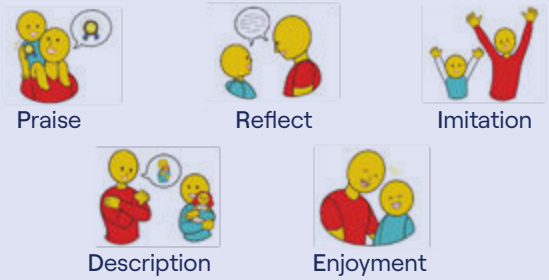
- Always step in and help your toddler if the situation is dangerous or you have any safety concerns.



TIPS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

- Try to see the world through your toddler's eyes.
- Notice what they do well and comment on it, for example, "great building" or "thank you for sharing".
- Spend quality time with your toddler – just 5 minutes of concentrated attention per day can make a positive difference to your relationship. (See the PRIDE diagram below).
- Develop strategies to stay calm in challenging situations.
- Keep expectations realistic.
- Always allow plenty of time so you aren't rushing your toddler.

BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP – PRIDE SKILLS



BENEFITS		EXAMPLE
Praise Behaviour	Increases behaviour you like. Brings connection to your relationship. Models positive social skills Increases self-esteem.	While clapping hands say: 'Great sharing!' 'Beautiful music!' 'Awesome talking!'.
Reflect Speech	Shows your child you're paying attention. Allows for word pronunciation. Increases the chance for your child to add more.	Child: 'Ba-ba.' Parent: 'Ba-ba-ball.' Child: 'Lello one.' Parent: 'Yellow block.'
Imitate Play	Gives your approval of child's play. Encourages child to model your behaviour. Teaches your child how to interact Helps child feel important.	Copy their physical movements – child puts arms up, parent puts arms up.
Describe Behaviour	Describes your child's body in action. Teaches organisation and ideas. Increases child's focus on task. Slows down an active child.	'You're making music.'
Enjoy Time	Providing physical affection adds warmth in the relationship. Using animated facial expressions and tone of voice keeps play fun. Models positive emotions.	Smiling and laughing together. Making eye contact and clapping. Giving a pat on the back or a hug.

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Behaviour

Your toddler may be full of curiosity and energy, discovering how the world works and where they fit in. It can be a uniquely challenging time for parents – but by establishing predictability and consistency, you can enjoy this stage together.

If you have a toddler question,
call Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464

WHAT TO EXPECT

- Your toddler is learning to regulate their big emotions. They are likely to have tantrums.
- Your toddler is trying to understand the world around them. They push boundaries to test what the rules and limits are.
- Your toddler is learning to be more independent and assertive.
- Your toddler is learning how to play and interact with others.
- Toddlers have shorter attention spans than older children and adults.
- Your toddler can't yet see that their actions have an effect on others.

REALITIES

- It can be hard to manage your toddler's behaviour.
- How you feel can have an impact on your toddler, so it's important to manage stress, take the time to calm yourself, and then reconnect with your toddler.
- Toddlers are very responsive to the environment around them. Feeling hungry, tired or unwell can all impact your toddler's mood and behaviour.

SAFETY

- Keep your toddler close and hold hands when out and about.
- If your toddler is having a tantrum, check their surroundings to ensure they will not injure themselves.



TIPS TO MANAGE BEHAVIOUR

- Your toddler needs you to be in tune and responsive to their needs in a kind, predictable and consistent way.
- They need boundaries and guidance as they learn about the world.
- When talking to your toddler, get down to their eye level and gain their attention.
- Pay attention to behaviours you want to encourage, giving labelled praise, e.g. "Thank you for packing away the toys – great job".
- Offer clear, simple instructions.
- Divert and distract your toddler from unwanted behaviour.
- Spend time playing and sharing experiences with your toddler – they love being with you.
- Allow opportunities to problem-solve but stay close and offer help if needed.
- Celebrate success, as this builds self-esteem and confidence.
- Talk to your toddler and give them words to describe how they're feeling.
- Try to limit the word 'no' in instructions, e.g. "We play gently with our toys".
- Give our toddler time to transition from one activity to another. They are more likely to cooperate.

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Tantrums and Aggression

Some days, it may feel like no matter what you do, your toddler is unhappy. Your toddler may have tantrums or become aggressive. This can look like hitting, kicking or biting. You are not alone. These are some common behaviours displayed by toddlers.



WHAT TO EXPECT

- Toddlers can throw tantrums if they feel misunderstood.
- There will usually be a trigger behind the tantrum or aggressive behaviour.
- Toddlers are not yet able to regulate or manage their emotions – they are still learning.

REALITIES

- It can be difficult as a parent when your toddler is expressing themselves through aggression or tantrums.
- To support your child, be prepared for any triggers.
- Avoid taking your child out if they are tired, hungry or unwell.

SAFETY

- If your child is having a tantrum, stay close and calm.
- If your toddler is having a tantrum, ensure they will not injure themselves from their surroundings.

TIPS FOR TANTRUMS AND AGGRESSION

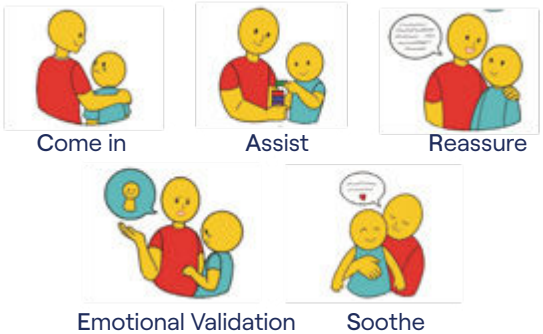
- Try and stay calm whenever your toddler experiences a tantrum or aggressive behaviour.
- You are their role model - your toddler will learn how to manage difficult situations and their emotions by watching you.
- The CARES diagram may be helpful in challenging situations.

TANTRUMS

- Try to divert and distract your toddler.
- Stay close and stay calm, offering soothing words e.g. "Daddy's here if you need help".
- Ensure that your toddler is safe.
- Once the tantrum is over, offer a cuddle (having a tantrum is scary for your toddler).
- Once they're calm, speak about what upset them.
- Use words that describe their feelings to encourage their understanding of emotions.

AGGRESSION

- Try to divert and distract your toddler.
- Be consistent and always address aggressive behaviour.
- If your toddler is aggressive, calmly get down to their eye level, gently hold their hands and say "no hurting".
- Turn away and remove eye contact for 3 seconds.
- Make eye contact again and say "no hurting, gentle hands". Your toddler may then need help to move to a different activity.
- Notice and praise gentle hands and gentle play.



C – Come in calmly and get close to your child

A – Assist your child when they have a problem

R – Reassure your toddler and let them know you are there for them

E – Emotional validation; talk about the emotion they are experiencing

S – Soothe your toddler with your voice and touch

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Parent Wellbeing



Children develop and thrive in homes which are nurturing and stable, even though families may experience rough times. Looking after yourself and seeking help when you need it can help navigate these times.

REALITIES

- Many people feel an expectation to be the perfect parent. It takes practice to get better. Be patient with yourself and your partner.
- It is common to feel a loss of identity. Being a parent can feel different to the identity you may have been used to before having children.
- Taking leave from your career when you have a baby is a big decision. It is common to feel conflicted about this.
- Many parents experience anxiety and/or depression (around 1 in 5 mums and 1 in 10 dads). Help is available via the Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464.
- Many parents struggle with how to be a role model when they themselves may not have had a role model to follow.
- Struggling to get the balance between career and family is common. Paid paternity leave can be limited, and the expectation can be to adapt very fast.
- Caring for your baby can take over everything, and at times it may feel as though your relationship is coming last.

SAFETY

- Sometimes you'll feel like you know what you're doing. Other times you won't. But you don't have to learn it all on your own. Getting support that you or a family member needs is a sign of great strength. Support networks exist as a way to promote the health and wellbeing of the entire family.

If you have a parenting question,
call Karitane Careline: 1300 227 464

WELLBEING TIPS

- Adjusting to parenting takes time for everyone. Learning any new skill takes time. You don't have to be perfect, just give it a go.
- It is normal not to know exactly what your child needs all of the time.
- Being a perfect parent is an unrealistic expectation. Don't believe everything you see on social media.
- Looking after yourself is important. When you're happier you're better able to support your partner and your child. Identify what was important to you before you had children, and find a way to include that in your life.
- Times are changing, so choose parental leave that is right for your family. Be brave, even if you are the first in your workplace. Discuss your plans with your partner and employer. It's OK if you want to return to work, but it's also OK if you change your mind.
- Seeking help early is important and forms part of managing problems successfully. Accept help from others, especially your partner.
- Check in with your partner and be specific about what you need. Respectful communication is important.
- Get involved with your child's routine. Be a team with your partner and embrace that each of you will handle your child differently.
- Take time to connect every day and spend time with your child. Never underestimate the power of a smile and a cuddle.
- Quality time as a couple is important to stay connected. Discuss what quality time means to both of you. Don't assume a romantic dinner is the magic fix.

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Toilet training you child



The time has come for your toddler to learn how to go to the toilet or potty! Toileting your toddler may take time and patience. This is a developmental step and will not happen until they are ready. A child is considered to be fully toilet trained when they initiate going to the toilet and can manage to adjust clothing before and after toilet use without soling or wetting their clothes or their surroundings.

Karitane respects each family has their own culture and parenting practices. This guide is an evidence- based resource you may choose to use for knowing how to support your child through this developmental stage.

WHEN IS TOILET TRAINING POSSIBLE?

- Around 2 years of age, your toddler's development for bladder and bowel control starts to appear, however, this can vary from child to child.
- If your toddler has developed voluntary control of the muscles that controls the bladder (urethral sphincter) and the bowel (anal sphincter), then training will be possible.
- It is not uncommon that your child may not have full control at night and may have some accidents some days, this is typical until about 5-7 years old.

SIGNS OF READINESS

As toilet training is a developmental stage, it is helpful to look for your child's ability to manage the following points. It is helpful to note that a child's signs of readiness include a combination of physical, developmental and behavioural signs rather than just their age.

- By 18-24 months toddlers are usually able to verbally tell you whether they have passed urine or opened their bowels (have done a wee or a poo)
- Are able to manage their clothing (pull pants down and up as needed)
- Show interest in others toileting and what the 'potty' is for
- You notice them start to wiggle around, or touch their body parts, cant concentrate on the task they are doing, indicating they want to wee or poo.
- Are staying dry from a day nap.
- Commonly from around 2 to 3 years of age, your child is aware of the need to go to the toilet and will say they need to do a poo or wee before it has happened.
- By 4 years of age most young children can go to the toilet by themselves.



GETTING STARTED

There are several options for getting started. Your toddler will probably let you know which one they prefer.

- Decide on the words your family will use for bodily fluids and using them consistently makes it easier for your child to recognise the words. Use actual names of body parts is recommended.
- Purchasing a potty, as usually potties are easier for toddlers to use when starting off, as their feet can be more secure on the floor. Your child can help pick the potty, decorate it, this will help them take ownership of their own potty.
- Teach your child about the potty by practising how to get on and off fully dressed. You could try reading a book them while they are sitting on the potty to keep them sitting for a few minutes. This is practice before they actually start their toilet training.
- You can help your child learn by placing the soiled nappy in the potty then disposing it, this may help them start to make the connections for the use of the potty.
- If they are comfortable sitting on the potty try it with pants down, encouraging a surprise 'wee' or seeing if they can do a wee in the potty like mummy or daddy.
- When you can notice your child showing signs of needing to go to the toilet, it can be helpful to take them to the potty and try and see if a wee or poo happens.
- Keep the potty clean, some children don't like using already used potty's or unflushed toilets.

ENCOURAGING GOOD PRACTICES

Toileting is a new skill that toddlers are learning. Learning new skills and changing to a new way of doing things can be tricky and can take time. Staying positive, calm and responsive to your child's needs can make it easier.

- It is helpful to consider 'when is the best time to start toilet training' by paying attention to what else is happening for the child that may add to their emotional pressure or stress. Such as are they adjusting to arrival of a sibling, moving to a new home, change in school or carers, are they unwell? If there are changes happening, it can be helpful to wait a few weeks, until things settle down before trying again.
- Dress your child in clothes that can be easily removed, buttons and zippers can be hard when you are in a hurry!
- If your child does not want to sit on the toilet, that's ok, try another time shortly after.
- Try to avoid over-reminding your child to go to the potty, they are still learning and will take time.
- Look for signs they may want to go to the toilet and support them to try.
- If an accident occurs, clean it up with as little fuss as possible, even consider asking them to help clean it up.
- Offer quiet enthusiasm, and specific praise for their efforts, such as trying to get to the potty on time, "good trying", attempting to get their pants off in time, "look, you tried hard to get your pants down" or "aren't you clever, you got your pants down in time". If they do a poo or a wee, "ooh look at that you did a wee in the potty" (with a smile, soft clap for example).
- Good hygiene like washing hands after using the toilet will help them learn good habits, they may need reminders and a little help while handwashing.
- Ensure a healthy diet full of dietary fibre and water for drinks.
- Support your child with any fears or worries they show when learning toileting behaviours. It is a new set of skills to learn and change can be stressful and scary. They need gentle encouragement and adjustments to how you go about helping them, as they progress through developmental milestone.
- Expect accidents in the early weeks or months before they master this task.
- It may take approximately 6 months for daytime urinary continence and around 6-7 months for stool continence to be fully toilet trained.
- If there is too much pressure or stress or they feel shamed it can make success much harder to achieve and it may take longer for them to fully develop the task of toileting effectively. You may need to stop for 2 to 3 months, then try again taking a gentler approach.
- Nighttime and nap training can take some time and might be helpful to start when your child is consistently dry during the day. Full nighttime bladder control may not happen for some children until 5-7 years old.
- Once your child is comfortable with using the potty, they may be ready for transitioning to a regular toilet with an over-the-toilet seat and step stool some young children like to go straight to the 'big toilet' but may need a step stool to reach the toilet easily.

KARITANE CARELINE: 1300 227 464

FOR ALL ENQUIRIES

138-150 The Horsley Drive,
Carramar NSW 2163

(02) 9794 2300

Together, we'll know what to do.

At Karitane, we understand there's something new and unique to every parent's experience. And while your natural instincts, or well-studied learnings will certainly kick in, it's also okay to not have every answer. So, as you venture out on the journey of parenthood, know that no matter what hurdles come your way, together, we'll know what to do.

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