

Top tips for Early Years Ofsted Inspectors: A guide for what to consider and look out for when assessing settings with regards to the management of issues relating to continence (bladder and bowel health) and toileting.

Introduction:

It is very important that education settings understand bladder and bowel difficulties and issues faced by children and young people. When measures are put in place to support learners and good practice is combined with timely and sensitive management by education staff, children will benefit from a positive experience of education and attain their full potential.

How many children are affected?

- Over 900,000 children in the UK experience continence difficulties (day and night wetting, constipation and soiling)
- Increasing numbers of children starting school each year still in nappies without having fully mastered bladder and bowel control
- Almost a third of children will suffer with constipation
- Many children continue to have issues with continence in the long term. Some have difficulties into adulthood
- Continence difficulties in childhood are sometimes assumed to be as a result of disability, behavioural issues, or ineffective parenting. This is rarely the case however

The impact on children and young people:

- The 'fear of being found out', embarrassment and stigma associated with bladder and bowel issues can have a lasting impact on a child's learning, development and quality of life
- A lack of awareness amongst health and education professionals and poor management of issues negatively affects many learners' experience of school
- Affected children and young people are at high risk of bullying and withdrawing from social situations
- Continence difficulties may also be associated with behavioural or psychological problems, poor self-image and peer victimisation
- [Research by the University of Bristol](#) has found that teenagers with incontinence are at greater risk of underachieving academically and need more support to remove barriers so they can reach their academic potential
- Frequent toilet trips mean that young people often miss time during lessons or exams
- Time off for medical appointments, sick days and repeated toilet trips during lessons risks young people falling behind in class
- Reduced concentration due to anxiety about needing to use the toilet can affect exam performance

Bowel and bladder health in young children

- Children are ready for potty training between about 18 months and 3 years old
- Toilet training is happening at a later age and developmental stage than in previous generations due to environmental, cultural and social changes
- Assumptions based on new norms, that children will not toilet train until they are about 2 ½ - 3 years old or older, may result in children with disabilities not being offered support to toilet train at an early stage
- Constipation can begin in babyhood and is particularly common when children are being potty trained or starting a new routine (transition from home to nursery for example)
- Young children have small bladders; they therefore need to use the toilet frequently
- Children should open their bowels three times a day to three times a week

TOP TIPS – what to look out for when assessing an Early Years setting

- ✓ A potty training policy should be in place with open communication between nursery staff and family (go to <https://www.eric.org.uk/potty-training-resources-downloads-and-links>)
- ✓ A policy should be in place for discussing continence problems with family.
- ✓ Staff should be able to recognise signs of constipation and act accordingly so that parents/carers know they should seek medical help.
- ✓ It's not good practice to use pull ups or nappies 'just in case of accidents' during potty training as it can hinder the process. Children need to be given a consistent message when they are making the transition to pants.
- ✓ Drinking should be promoted throughout the school day. Water is ideal but suitable alternatives should be allowed.
- ✓ Children must not be refused admission to a setting due to continence difficulties
- ✓ Learners who are known to have continence difficulties should be offered a care plan, to ensure their individual needs are met in school
- ✓ Parents should not be expected to come to school to change their children
- ✓ Ensuring learners have access to clean, well-stocked toilets at intervals appropriate to the needs of the individual child

Further Resources and more information

[Managing continence issues in nurseries, schools and colleges](#) – best practice guidance produced by [Bladder and Bowel UK](#) and [ERIC, The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity](#)

University of Bristol Policy Report: [Young people with continence problems need better support at secondary school](#)

Managing Continence Issues in Secondary Schools - short film: <https://youtu.be/QHBIjlsSjPI>