Potty Training at School
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- [Jessica] Hello and welcome to early childhood education at Continued.com. My name is Jessica Lewis and I'm very happy to welcome you to today’s session titled Potty Training at School. We are so excited to have Karen Deerwester back with us again to share her knowledge and expertise with us. Let me tell you a bit about her. Karen is the owner of Family Time Coaching and Consulting. She’s the director of family time classes at Bnai-Torah Congregation in Boca Raton. And the host of the weekly podcast, See Me, Hear Me, Love Me. Karen is the author of three parenting books. The Entitlement Free Child, The Playschool Guide to Potty Training, and The Potty Training Answer Book, which one the 2008 NAPA Gold Award for parenting resources. Come of today’s course is going to come from her books on potty training so I’m very excited to hear that. She has also appeared on numerous TV and radio programs including MSNBC, NBC, and NPR, as well as contributed parenting and early childhood advice to Parent Magazine, Parenting Magazine, Real Simple, Women's Day, and Essence Magazine. Welcome everyone. Karen, I'm gonna turn it over to you now.

- [Karen] I'm thrilled to be here, hi everyone. We are going to talk about potty training at school. So let's figure out what we want to accomplish today as we talk about children, policies and most important how we're going to communicate that to parents. So our learning outcomes for today are let’s identify readiness characteristics and individual strengths for successful potty skill building. We also want to define and describe school policies for respectful and supportive potty learning. And describe how to communicate effectively with parents for a positive, supportive home/school potty partnership. So it all begins with developmentally appropriate practice, and with readiness transparency because if we are really clear about what the skills are, the behaviors, the learning strengths that are involved on potty success and mastery, then we can create policies, programs, strategies and support for teachers, children and for parents to make this the best possible experience. So where do we wanna begin with
this readiness transparency? First developmental skills and skill building. It is that developmental puzzle, that perfect storm where all the complex, contradictory and crazy parts of development come together for the click. The click that makes potty easy and accessible. So as early childhood educators, we know that we are the best resources and support for parents to do this because we start where children are, exactly where they are, not where we want them to be, and we create that scaffold to take them forward to where we know they can go, where they want to go, to full mastery and success. And the scaffolding is the bridge that we create, connecting the dots so that we can pull the support away and they can be masterful and successful on their own. But in order to do that, we use the best principles of early childhood to make learning visible. Because if we are just great teachers holding it in our heads, then somehow we can't model and demonstrate and reflect on all of that learning visibility that we know is so strategic and important to our programming and our policies and practices as great early childhood educators. We also then have to make trust visible. Trust with the child and most importantly, again, trust with the parents. Because as we know in our new world, nothing we are doing is just with children. It's with children and families.

So what are we gonna look at when we look at the potty learning puzzle of readiness. We are looking at physical skills, verbal skills, social-emotional that I'm putting together here, and cognitive. And by understanding that every child wants to be masterful, development is this beautiful thing. It's this engine that pushes children and propels children and helps children go forward into reading, writing, self regulation, self management, and an understanding of themself in the world. So all we have to do is figure out what children are bringing to us, and using our best developmental knowledge to help children go forward. So let's start with the physical readiness because we know that the cornerstone of potty success is going to be to be able to manage my body and understand my body. First and most important, if a child can't stay dry for some period of time, two hours, one hour, then they're not ready. If they
aren't in some ways holding pee, holding their poop, and then eventually making the
decision, where is this going to go, then we will never get to final success. We can still
create an immersion environment of potty learning, which we will do, but we also have
to know that they have to be able to physically control their bodies and understand that
they're the ones that are holding and that big word that comes with potty learning and
success, letting go. Because letting go requires a great deal of confidence, safety and
understanding. So some of the signs that we're going to be looking for, will they wake
up dry from naps. Do they pee and poop regularly Not all children pee and poop
regularly, as you're gonna find out in a few more slides. But for the children, when you
start to see regularity in the body, now I can self regulate and self manage. So once
again let me just remind everyone that when I use the word potty training and potty
learning, I am thinking about self regulation, self mastery. It's not just catching pee and
poop. We are potty partners for a significant amount of time. A week, a month.
Guiding, steering, leading. But inevitably, children need to master their bodies
themselves.

So if you start to see regularity, for parents it's going to be before bath time or after
breakfast. At school it's going to be before going outside or after a nap. When are the
times when you start to see patterns happening? What are the tell tale signs that your
child is pottying? Okay, if your child is communicating physically on their face, uh-oh,
or holding their body or doing the potty dance, then I have physical cues that I can
show the child, because we are always holding up that mirror. What's going on in my
brain, in my body, in my life that I can help as a teacher or as a parent to understand.
So if they start to show signs that they are going potty, we have tools that we can work
with to move forward. Can your child walk to a designated place to accomplish a goal.
Now again, there are many ways to potty train and I'm not opposed to baby led potty
training, but that's not what I'm talking about when I'm talking about pottying at
school. When a child says, I have to go, and you say go to the bathroom. And that
eventually, that they're going to be able to remove parts of clothing. So there's also
going to be some fine motor skills that are going to be necessary. And the patience to
manage those obstacles that will eventually come to pottying. What are the
social-emotional readiness behaviors. Children are going to ask questions about
pottying long before they are potty training. I believe we create a potty, positive potty
environment starting at 18 months. We don’t start introducing potty training when it’s
time to potty. We create an immersive culture of potty and body and thinking long
before. And that’s this whole social-emotional soup that we, that brings excitement,
interest and curiosity. So who goes on the potty? Who goes in a diaper? No shame, no
blame. Are you wearing a diaper today? And then through those toddler diaper
changes, you start saying, there’s pee in here. And you made it pee because everyone
drinks, everyone eats, everyone pees, everyone poops. We are creating
social-emotional connections to a potty world. Children wanna follow others into the
bathroom. We don’t have to teach this. We know parents don’t get to ever go to the
bathroom by themselves.

We know that children are very curious about rooms and patterns and routines and
behaviors. So this is one of our connecting milestones, but it’s also, these are the tools
we’re going to use when it’s time to connect dots to what children have in readiness,
and what might be a missing piece of a puzzle. They want to introduce potty behavior.
So this little guy, he’s not imitating anybody, but he’s curious and experimenting in this
picture. All of it is good. All of it is something for us to build on and use as teachers. If
they like clean diapers and they ask to be changed at appropriate times, then we
know, oh they’re starting to think about it, they’re starting to care about it. They’re
starting to not like a piece of something that matters for us moving them forward and
helping them put the pieces of the puzzle together. They care about the outcomes of
their actions. They express likes and dislikes after they do something. And if they’re
reminded, will remember those preferences the next time. Remember how fun it was to
hear the pee pee going in the potty. Remember how cold it was to sit on the toilet. And
you went oh. I can now help you conquer that emotional moment or that stressful
moment because you are now interacting with me about this experience. And they have to be willing to sit because pottying requires a little bit of patience. And again, that ultimate word that's going to be so critical for us today, self-regulation. We want them to have verbal readiness skills. No, they don't have to be able to read the book by themselves on the potty, but I do love it. But they have to start to understand their body parts have names and we can talk about body parts. You also want to make sure parents are really clear on the body part names you'll be using in school so that everybody is communicating well and efficiently. You want the child to be able to tell you before he's potted in his diaper and then after he's potted. Now is it a verbal readiness skill that he's already gone and tells you that he has to go potty? It is, because now you're making a language potty connection. So it's okay that you missed an opportunity or they haven't gotten to the next step, but once they give you that teaser, then you know, oh there's pee pee in your diaper. I can change it. Next time or one day you'll decide to put the pee pee in the toilet. They can follow simple directions. They have to be able to have this verbal interaction because pottying, what I learned writing the books is that it's not just about, oh create a habit or routine, catch it, lead to success. It is this beautiful configuration of developmental skills all in alignment, but it's also at a stage when children may be most resistant to having somebody else tell them what to do or manage their world.

So we always have this power issue that is side by side and a control issue with potty learning, which to me just makes it that much more exciting developmentally. So you want to be able to say, quick, run to the bathroom. Have them have ears for it. And then have the emotional readiness to go, hmm, I'm with her on this or with him on this. You want the child to be able to tell you what he needs in a very simple way when they are early in the language stages, and then more down the road. Because early on just need to go oh, oh, oh pee pee. You know, tell me if you have to go. Tell me what you need. And them to know, I'm here to assist you. I'm on your side. And then when you get to the big struggles, I don't wanna let it out because it's gonna splash me when it
poops in the toilet. Or I don’t wanna go because I just, I have to know how to ask for help. I have to know how to communicate fears, anxieties in a verbal and behavioral way. And yes, I think I wan them to be able to say they wanna do it themself because I want them to take on the responsibility. So we have the verbal and we have the social-emotional there. Cognitive readiness, I love this guy. We know for example that in development, we have to experience things as objects before we experience them with their true purpose. So babies experience books to eat, to throw, to stand on before they understand it’s books that has a message and you turn pages. So same thing with potties. I have to become, that potty has to become my friend before I am ready to sit on it and do something appropriate. So we will help him know that potty seats, that that doesn’t go on his head. But in the beginning, before he's peeing in it, it's okay to not know that this is, has a specific use in the world. So I want the child to be curious about how their body works. Because it's cognitive. See, with potty training, what happens is we have all these external behavioral things and expectations, but it's gotta click on the brain, which is oh my body is making pee and poop. My body has muscles that close and open and relax and let it out.

My body plays tricks on me. So I need this brain connection to be there and that's why I love everyone poops as the first book that I will ever read at 18 months, 20 months because they also, because it's not about an agenda. I always start with let it be about how children understand what pee and poop is all about. And they will see the connection between their body and this potty. I need them to understand sequencing before, during, and after because I have to know before it's coming, when it's coming, and what to do after. And make choices along the way. I do believe that children who line up their toys are way more comfortable with the order, sequence and right place of going potty. They have this real, ah yes, everything goes in its place. That makes it a little easier. That's cognitive as well as emotional. They have to be able to think ahead and stop doing something if they need to potty. Oh, I feel it coming. I have to interrupt this, self-regulation at its best. Put this on hold while I go do something else. And then I
have to understand time to understand I can return to that thing and trust that it'll still be there for me. I have to understand that those potty books and videos are relevant to my actions. We know somewhere right before that second birthday, toddlers really internalize the message of books. Whether they are the No David books, whether they are How Dinosaurs Say Goodnight or Eat Their Food. Or whether it's Everyone Poops. And when I'm reading an Everyone Poops book to a table of nearly twos, I can see in their eyes, if they're connecting with the message and if it's about them or if it's just another cute book I'm reading. So I want them to make that connection because now I have the power to use books, stories, and games to support their learning. And I need them to understand the big picture. This is not just a sometimes skill. Eventually, this is gonna be, this is how we say goodbye to diapers. And I want them to be able to hold that thought, that there's a big expectation in the making here and I wanna make sure that you're up for it. So as I said before, it is this big puzzle. All the readiness factors don't arrive on their own. So our role as parents, as teachers is to see where children are, see where the missing pieces are, and use our best practices to scaffold them forward into success and mastery.

So what's the positive potty environment? As I said, it starts long before we have an agenda or an expectation. Just as we introduce language before we expect children to speak, we introduce pottying long before. I want potty training to be fun because children learn through play. So this has to be really vital that we have a positive attitude and we convey the information the way children love to learn. I want the potty gear to be helpful rather than complicated. Look at that bathroom. I don't want there to be anything intimidating, scary. It's different enough from their homes. And so I want them to understand that this is a place for them, supporting them and their success. I want bathrooms to be child friendly. We want them to have, what does child friendly mean? It's mine and it's about me. And I can access it on my terms, in my way. I want routines to be stable and predictable. No coercion, no stress, no intimidation, and of course, no, no, no, no shame. I want schedules to be relaxed. And this is very, very relevant for
parents because I think the two biggest obstacles to early potty training and if you’re getting that question from your grandparents or adults of a different generation, why is it taking this generation so long to potty train these littles? No, children are just as smart as ever, but diapers of course, interfere with children’s awareness of their body because they are made to have children feel dry and the same all the time. And diaper companies would love children to be in them forever. And also, schedules. Parents are on the go. Parents are in cars. Weekends are busy, full of activities. So it’s okay that we take a break when we need to make this a priority. Expectations should be only opportunities for success, not anything that is off putting for a child or for a parent. And we need to choose easy to clean clothes and surfaces. We do that in school, but parents need the understanding that they are the partners in this and that we want them to know that accidents will absolutely be a part of the struggle when the struggle arrives. So this is mostly for parents, but we are the positive potty role models that anchor this for everyone. So how’s our stress level? How’s the stress level, and as teachers I think, you’re really great at saying, I’m great at this. I understand children, I’ve done this a thousand times. But each classroom has a different stress barometer.

And so I want you to know, if you’re even stressed that a particular parent is coming or a particular child, that’s going to challenge your success, your assumptions. Do you believe that each child will be successful in his or her own time? Truly, truly, truly because the thing that I know is all children don’t read at the same time. All children don’t write letters in the right direction at the same time. Why do we think that there is a specific age that children should have that skill for managing their body? I do think we should be actively engaged in potty guidance and support, but I don’t want us to think that we control the when, because if we believe that there is a timetable, children will feel that and be pretty sure to create obstacles and hurdles and detours for us. Is it a genuine priority or do you just fit it in when it’s convenient? Or are Mondays easier for potty training than Fridays? So we really need to consider our emotions, the emotional barometer of our classrooms, of our school, and of course of our parents’
school communication. Do you talk about children’s potty abilities to other adults in front of the child? And we just know that children are listening, children are watching. Those right brains are reading our right brains, so they are picking up on all of the emotions. If we're going to talk about relationships in our classrooms with children, relationships with our parents, I just need to make sure that all of them are respectful as they can be. That's not to say I haven't talked about a child learning a skill in front of the child with the parent, but I'm very aware that the child is listening to me. So they aren't invisible, that's just my opinion on that. Do you talk about dirty diapers or soiled clothes as icky, yucky, nasty? I think we're bigger and better than that, but parents are done with diapers. So we want to manage those hidden messages because as always, our children are listening to all of our messages, not just the ones we want to portray, but the ones that we're really portraying. And can you appreciate potty training through each child’s experience so that you prevent your own boredom and burnout? And what I mean by that is, if you've done this a long time, sometimes you forget the relationship with the child that's present, and as we work towards making learning visible and making trust visible, it means that I need to be connecting to each developmental story and value in this experience. So deep breath, take care of yourselves and make sure that you're as fresh as you can be.

Okay, so let's talk about temperament. Temperament is essential because the readiness by itself makes us think that we can control those factors without meeting each child as an individual where they are. But for me, we know that each child brings their own personality. And this teaches us the how we take those readiness puzzle pieces and help fit them to each situation, each child and the reality of what's happening in our classrooms any given year. Because no two years are the same. So even though we might have had everybody graduate with potty success last year from our two year old program, that might not happen next year. So how do children learn and appreciate change or how do they resist it? And think of this always with parents as well. So there are three temperament styles. Of course there is a whole 'nother
webinar on this so you’re free to go take a look at that, but let’s look at it just from a potty training point of view. Easy, slow to warm up, and difficult. So the easy temperament child is going to be more relaxed and casual about how they potty learn. But that doesn't mean they’re going to be the quickest. So just take that deep breath. This is not timetable. This is about how we connect the experience, the learning strengths, and the change. They are less frenetic and they’re able to sit from greater lengths of time. So just know that that’s a great advantage, but also keep in mind that not all temperament styles have this ability, so don’t have that expectation for every temperament style. They adapt well to schedules. They’re relaxed. You’re changing the routine today, fine, I’ll go with the flow. Which makes your life easier as you’re introducing potty routines to your classroom, and you're asking children to be flexible. But also their feeding schedules and their nap schedules are more predictable, which leads to more predictable potty schedules. So they are going to understand the routine and regulation in their body because their body is their friend, their body doesn't play tricks on them.

There's another temperament that's going to have a body that's gonna play tricks on them on a regular basis. It's not gonna be predictable. Also, they are not easily distracted from a task. So if you're on the way to the bathroom with them and they see a new toy, you can say, oh we'll come back and get that and they will also remember it and be able to relax with a flexibility that not all temperament styles have. They will be able to listen to verbal encouragement and support without a strong emotional reaction. So I just, I love this idea of temperament because those strong resistance reactions, no, mine, not doing it your way no matter what, is not about you. It’s not personal. It's not about a parent who’s done something wrong. It's about a different in temperament style. So appreciate those children that take your messages with ease. The sensory experience of sitting on that cold potty or of a naked bottom. You know, now you’ve been in this diaper, you know, imagine just that comfort of being held by a diaper physically. It could be startling to some children. But with that easy
temperament, is gonna be like oh naked, I feel air, it’s okay. They might love it a little bit too much even. They will respond easily to pottying in a variety of situations under a variety of conditions. So they can pause one activity if they need to go take a potty break because they just have that ease and flexibility. But also they might not be completely at a halt when they come across a poop that splashes or a hard poop or a pee that, you know, there’s just all those factors of generalizing this skill that’s going to throw other temperament children off. But the easy temperament child still needs the explanation, the support, but they’re going to take that information with an ease. Like oh, thanks for letting me know why that was the way it was. They’re going to be eager to embrace new potty expectations. Now the only thing I find with the easy temperament is sometimes, and this is a half joke, that those very precocious easy temperament girls will be like, oh I’m ready to potty train and I’m only 22 months and I can walk myself to the bathroom. I’ll tell you all about it. They want to do the new thing. So they have this first month or two of success, and then they have this complete retreat that was like, I showed you what I could do, but now I’m gonna hit resistance stage and back track.

So easy temperament children might be eager for a new experience, when they may not even have the emotional commitment to the long term picture. Or they might not have the physical ability to hold it. They’re just like yeah, give me underwear. Careful, careful, careful. Just because they say they can do it doesn’t mean they can do it. But overall, the potty training process will be more lighthearted. Now what about those slow to warm up, watchful temperament children? They wanna be prepared before taking action. These might be the children that do potty train in a weekend, but they might have been rehearsing it in their head or watching for months. The research says that potty training takes four to six months. But that's not four to six months of active potty training. I mean, that could be a weekend or a week or two weeks. But it’s that whole immersion process, filling in the readiness and then managing the hurdles and mistakes set backs that come after, which is part of the generalizing of the skill. But
slow to warm up children like to be prepared. They have a mild disposition that complements a slow and repetitive routine that we are so good at as early childhood teachers. They also are the classic tortoise. Moving steadfastly towards a goal. And so whether you are the teacher that might be the easy, impatient person that's like, faster, faster, faster, it means create that allowance to respect them exactly who they are. You won't have loud power struggles with a slow to warm up child. But you might have cautious resistance. So once again, you might try to storm them through it. My advice is stay with slow tortoise pace, even though that's not your natural setting. The child with a slow to warm up temperament may seem very sensitive to the physical experiences. So they might have to test it, touch it, well I don't know about touch it. You figure out how to let them approach skills in tiny little small pieces, rather than all in. They love learning new skills, so that's going to be yeah, if you're connecting the dots they're with you because they will be able to have that reassurance of going forward. But they do need a hand to hold through that process. So patience, patience, patience. This child tends to linger on the sidelines before jumping in, but once they've got the skill, they're all in and confident. And again, do not misunderstand caution for positive or negative. It's just their way.

Okay, so here comes the difficult temperament child. And of course, I love this temperament style because it is the one that engages me in my natural setting. But potty training is a physical activity. So intensity can go well with it, but they're not gonna love sitting still. So you have to find other ways to engage them in big action. Running to the potty, hopping to the potty. Pulling toilet paper is always magical, but again, we have to introduce that with boundaries. So it's even if they're only taking a little bit, have the have power. Intense difficult temperament children love power and they love things their way. But this is the temperament style that has the unpredictable potty, the body awareness. So you have to know that their potty behavior yesterday isn't gonna be like their potty behavior tomorrow. And so you have to be ready to help them read body signals and adapt. They like to do things in a big, big, big way so
you’re teaching strategies and your encouragement for parents has to match the child’s temperament. But they will experience every nuance of the potty experience. So be ready to explain it all, but they are more black and white than easy or slow to warm up. So this means, I got all the pieces, but I’m gonna, I am going to keep you moving forward. And moving forward to me, the image is always how do you put the bumpers in the gutter balls so that we are steering and guiding without letting kids or success fall off the rails. They do not like to give up so they will be intensely driven and motivated, but they also have singular focus. So they may not stop playing with that toy. And so you may have to be the invisible hand that moves them forward. They will protest vehemently, but they’re used to that because that’s how they are reacting to all learning and change and skill building. We love them and we are ready to let them express their big voices. And when they say no, my response is, I love the word no. It feels strong and powerful. No, no, no. But it might just mean maybe, so get it out, validate it and still let them know, we all still sit on the potty before going to the playground.

And never, ever, ever ask a yes or no question of a child, and especially a potty training question unless you are comfortable and prepared to accept no as an answer. Otherwise you’re just playing a trick on them. It wasn’t really a question. Potty training is not one size fits all, but that’s what we do best as educators. We know how to individualize, but now how do we individualize and still keep our sanity and classroom harmony and patience? But also remember that there is not one age at which children can, will absolutely manage and master this. But there is an age range that children should be engaged in potty learning. So what are the strengths? How do we adapt our classrooms to meet the learning strengths where children are? And what’s really important about this is this is what we do. This is play. This is why we love teaching. Potty training isn’t something we do on the side. Potty training is interwoven into all of the things that we do in a whole child, whole potty culture classroom. So it is for every learning style. The games, it works for everyone and it's just finding our teaching
strategies. And as we know from learning styles, the best teachers teach to all the learning strengths. So let’s make sure that we are broad and inclusive in how we teach. Verbal reinforcement for potty skills are stories, songs, rhymes, and books. So I can sing, ♪ Happy potty to me ♪ when I’m washing my hands so that I wash my hands long enough. I can use all of those, that potty literature from Everyone Poops on, but I’m gonna use the books then to create the imaginations games about the characters. And then I’m gonna use the books to build questions. When I ready Everyone Poops, the first question is, is your poop big or little? Let’s make it about all that learning. This is the starting point, pottying, potty culture. But the books give us content. The stories and songs give us content. Rhymes as well. So then with physical movement, as with all teaching, it’s not literal because we’re early childhood. So yes, we wanna do the fine motor for getting the clothes on and off. Yes, we wanna be able to run to the bathroom walk backwards to the bathroom if we’re trying to slow down an experience. It’s just like all the transition games we know. But then think about up, down, turn around. What about sitting and standing. In my school, we do lots of, do you do this, do you do this, do you sit when you pee, do you stand when you pee? If you wanna go there. I mean, I have parents in my classrooms so I have a lot more freedom in terms of what I’m brave enough to talk about. But allow the games to be supportive of the skills that you’re looking for for potty success.

As I said, with imagination, I want it to be potty power stories. So when the child, when the parent tells you the child can’t go into an auto flush classroom, public bathroom or the parent tells you that your school classroom isn’t like home, make sure you have strategies that use imagination and games. Social, make sure that we are talking about our friend’s success and our friend’s struggles without shame or comparison. And make sure that there’s a pride to being part of a potty parade, to hanging underwear on our sticks and marching around, to wearing our potty crowns. And then finally, I love sequencing games to help before, during, after. Even if it’s just the bathroom experience. After we sit on the potty, we get our toilet paper. How much toilet paper,
this much. And then we wipe, and then we wash hands. So use it, use it, use it, use it. But now how are we gonna generalize that? We’re gonna let parents know and children know that we are a culture of mistake making. What did you make today? I made mistakes. And we want parents to know and children to know that my classroom, my school celebrates mistakes. So how are we going to define school policy? What we wanna do is let parents know that this is a process because we are process learners and that’s developmentally appropriate. When we come up with our school policy, we wanna make sure that it is general and that we start it long before the one and one begins with active potty training. We wanna be clear, transparent, consistent, flexible and problem solving. Just like this picture here, I need them to know this is a rope, not a ride. So we have intention and we do have expectations, but they are developmental expectations. And so let’s find out how to use this developmentally and in our communication. So as I interviewed everyone, I found there’s a ton of stuff that is happening in the parent/school communication and in our personal reflections of how we are creating our values and our choices around potty learning and toddler and two year old experiences.

I believe that you need a list of developmental signs and behaviors. You are welcome to use the ones that are in this webinar, but if you just Google it online you could get a short list that's all very succinct. Pick the one that works for you. I do believe that potty policy might wanna say that it's child led. For me, that's absolutely essential, but that matches my developmental philosophy. What I know is that it can’t be parent-led because the schools that allowed it to be parent-led found chaos and confusion and the teachers were completely overwhelmed because they had 20 personalized and customized potty plans in those classrooms. And I don’t want potty training to create stress for you, for those children, or for the families. But it also can't be teacher-led because we’re gonna go into a collaborative model of parent communication so it can't just be our way. I need it to be specific about potty vocabulary. I need it to acknowledge parent readiness and child readiness. Both eagerness and resistance
because both exist. And so I want you to be able to talk about both. I want you to be able to identify the non-readiness factors that get in the way of success. Convenience, peer pressure, and parent stress. So that you can hold parent hands because we’re not just scaffolding for children skills, we’re scaffolding for parent understanding skills and partnerships. I wanted to address food rewards because your parents are Googling everything there is out there and they have their favorite parent bible and some of those recommendations are using M&Ms. Some of them are to use skills and strategies that may work at home, but that may never fly in your school or your classroom. So you need to be reflective and clear. Diaper free weekends at home first. Do you need the parents to make a commitment to having done something before you allow a child to go diaper free? Now the only thing about that is yes, yes, yes, we know that parents may be less truthful or more hopeful than reality, and so that's where collaboration and communication is going to be essential. I want you to be able to talk about routines, reminders, and frequencies. Be specific in the commitment you are prepared to make to the child and to the parent. Are accidents okay?

Now, you don't have to say how many, but parents are gonna wanna know because there's enormous parent stress out there. Are they gonna throw me out, when? Back-plans, the what ifs. What if this is a child that's still having accidents, that has a new sibling, that's just moved, that has developmental issues? How will you handle those contingencies? And does someone have the last word? Is it okay if a teacher says not ready? Say that up front so that a parent isn’t confused at the end. Make a list of how different it is to potty train them at home, at school. Look at that picture. You can't do that in school. Many expectations that parents have, you know parents are writing long lists of here's our potty plan. Just as they give it to grandparents, they're giving it to schools and teachers. It ain't gonna work like that. You'll be crazy. Talk about naked time at school. Talk about no diaper nap times. I'm not hearing that's going very successfully in lots of schools. Talk about the time commitments and time constraints of a school, but not because you're taking something away from a parent,
but because school gives children the opportunity to do something bigger and better than what they can have at home. Discuss rewards, not the same home to school. Discuss individual potty seats. I cannot believe that a school will say yes to 10 different potty seats. No, we have to find our confidence and our experience and our expertise to be able to say, I’m your potty training partner, but I can’t have an individual potty seat for every child. Watch out for parents who want you to be coercive or because we can’t do that. And many schools have opinions about potty training coaches and boot camps as undermining schools’ policies and plans. So just say, you know you could use that for home, but you have to respect our responsibility to do it our way at school. But you can say yes to many things that parents want you to say yes to. One example that I heard is when school, and they shared with me all the letters that parents were sending in. This is our plan, this is what our expectations are, this I what we want. One parent wants 10 minute reminders. One parent wants no reminders. So maybe you can customize that, but this, I’m not giving you a potty training policy for your school because I need you to be reflective with your teachers, your routines, what your reality is and maybe talk to some parents about their frustration or their successes at your school or your classroom.

What about pull-ups and going commando style? You want to be able to say, I can do this but I can’t do this. I did hear that many, many parents would like the older classrooms, three’s and pre-k to still be able to communicate about potty learning and potty habits and routines, because we still have withholding poop in the three’s. We still have withholding pee. One explanation, it was the biggest thing I learned writing the books, withholding is always about children feeling powerless and over managed in their potty experience. Are you using potty training apps? What kind of communication can you make available to parents, and how will you celebrate? Make that the very best you can make it. Okay, now let’s go to our written policy. If it is not one and done. You don’t get to do this once and be finished with your potty communication. This is about preparing your statement that works best for you for clarity in communication.
and in expectations. Know what you believe, know how you’re going to communicate it. What are the best early childhood practices that you want represented? What’s your reason for potty training? How do you explain your goals and what your hope for every child in your program will be? Explain those readiness traits. Explain the regulations that limit or guide what you can and can’t do. Explain, if you have three strikes and you’re out, explain all the things that might feel like obstacles or struggles to parents, so that you can engage with that. Create the communication options. Do you want them texting, do you want them emailing? Do you want to sit one on one, and who should they sit one on one with? What I know from one of our great teachers who’s using the Seesaw app for a daily teacher blog in elementary school is she can track when parents are most interested in communication, because you know they’re not caring about potty training information all year. There are just gonna be critical moments in time when they’re going to need better communication options and more one on one. So make sure you are steering and guiding those. Does it feel like a lot? It is, but it’s also that we are no longer just teaching children.

We are working as collaborative partners with parents, and this is what makes us invaluable and our work more meaningful. And it actually will make our work easier once we make the shift to being able to have true partnerships and true support for parents. So these are the general traits of what I know about how to connect and communicate with a new generation of parents, so that we can minimize misunderstanding, and create realistic expectations. So the expectations, again, visible, visible, visible. It’s all about transparency. We know that parents today do need more praise and feedback. Praise is the cliche word. I prefer the Lilian Cat’s, encouragement. That’s how we know to meet people where they are and create the feedback, the scaffolding that does walk them through a process of moving forward. And you can trust me to take you forward. So they do need, you need to be the encourager and you need to be the professional, but a partner. Peer and tech connected. Has anybody doing Facebook potty pages for their schools? Are you
creating Facebook posts? Are you finding ways for parents to talk with one another, to counteract the comparison stress of he did, that child went at two, why not mine? Explain it. Use it as a celebration of both children, not a race that one is held, one child is held up. That peer comparison and that peer network is not going away so make sure that we are part of it. If we push, criticize, or challenge parents they are gonna fall back. We are gonna break that trust and they will not be, they won't be able to be our partner and follow us forward, and they may not be loyal to us as educators in the sense of we're gonna lose a connection that's vital for everything we're trying to do this year. In this new generation of parents, silence will be mistaken for disapproval. The workshop on millennial parents and communication is that it has to be on demand, social and personal. The on demand means we live in a world where we expect people to respond quickly, whether it's on Twitter, whether it’s on Instagram, whether it's on Facebook. We wanna see the likes. We wanna see the reassurance. And we want to be noticed. So don't ignore and don't not talk about something just because a parent hasn't initiated it. They might need the trust first and the encouragement that I can hold your fears and your anxiety. And mentoring expectations are harsh. They push people away, but mentoring is continuous and on-going and embrasive. In the same way it is in our early childhood classrooms. It is all about relationships. This is relationship based communication.

This is what we do with children because we know that that fight or flight part of the brain, the emotional downstairs part of the brain needs to be at peace, needs to be relaxed so that we can go to higher ordered learning and self regulation. True for kids, true for grownups. So what do we know? We know that when we are engaging parents it is head and heart. I will hold your feelings, I will hold your fears, I will hold your hand until you are on the same page with me cognitively and behaviorally and every step of the way. We know from research, with children and with grownups that if I have voice and choice, that I have higher court, I have higher endorphins in my brain. My fight or flight is turned off when I can speak. So just as children no longer should be seen and
not heard, parents need to be seen and heard as well. See me, hear me, love me. It is about the stories and the values. This is not about a right way expert approach to potty learning or to education. This is about here's who we are as educators. Here's what early childhood stands for. Here's the joy and glory of potty training skills and training potty training at a time when children have never been more interested in power, self-management, and self-control. So let me make this an enormous developmental moment. There was a Facebook post about sprinkling fairy dust on tantrums. That's what it means to be a developmental teacher or parent. So what if we're sprinkling fairy dust, that's the story and the value that flips the potty stress into something better. This has to be 360 degree communication. What does that mean? That means that everybody in the school, everybody in the classroom, other children are all on the same page in terms of what we believe developmentally, emotionally, and culturally about learning our potty skills. This is about valuing mistake making. Early childhood is the best practice and policy in this world. I know that, that's why I'm a lifelong educator. So let's use something like potty training to help others appreciate the developmental power of meeting children where they are, of social-emotional intelligence. Ah, I got this. It's about timing and timeliness because what we know is that parents only care about the information because they're in information overload.

They only care about it when it is relevant and of immediate access. So make sure you have ongoing, make sure you're there when they need it. And make sure they know how to find you when they need it. Because the stress, busyness and anxiety is only going to create obstacles, frustration, challenges, resistance, and lack of success. It's not, so potty training comes with a ton of fear of missing out. Why is everybody else on the happy potty train, and I'm left back at the station all by myself, alone? Loneliness, it's a big part of this parent world. We are here to change that because we are early childhood community. We connect. It's about joy of missing out. So our flip the script in making learning and trust transparent, is about creating a joy for each child's developmental story. One plus one equals three, because I'm not a my way potty
trainer, I know what I know. I’m committed to what I know. I can set boundaries around what works in my school and my classroom. But ‘cause it’s not a free for all, but I can grow and learn by listening to you. And so parent, teacher, and child, I guess it’s one plus one equals more than three because collaboration is bigger than me, is bigger than you, and is about a better world. So potty power, success. The big exhale for all of the stress that comes with this, it’s about everyone is successful. But not in that cliche way because we can do better than that. Nobody’s gonna go to kindergarten in diapers. Nobody’s gonna walk down the aisle, yeah, yeah, yeah. And sometimes you need to be casual and cavalier, but it’s a deep, powerful belief in success because we know development and we know how to teach. And it’s how to frame that success in developmentally appropriate practice and research. Okay. So here’s what I believe in our final wrap up about why is this about a child and not about a potty? The relationship that I have with a child and so that I can help reassure parents that this is about their child and not about something external and random. A child makes a personal leap of faith every time he tries something new. Yes, I can celebrate this, but I can also appreciate the risk and the emotional struggle that’s coming with this.

A child saying goodbye can only say goodbye to diapers when he feels safe and confident with change. We are part of this social-emotional ease and peace. And we know everything about emotional intelligence is the key to lifelong learning, so how about if I can make a child feel safe in this huge developmental skill that I can be a part of with your child. A child has to make a deliberate choice about that physical sensation that he might need to pee and poop. So now I’m gonna go inward and cognitively and honor choice in a child. It’s all about power. It’s all about responsibility. It’s all about self-regulation. That they are relying on body, mind, and will to cooperate. You know how hard that is for us? What if I can show and celebrate and honor how magnificent this skill is? A child has the final say about his body, her body. And so power struggles will always be detrimental to a positive body experience. So how if I am honoring voice and choice for children, that I don’t wanna be the bully, the
authoritarian, I can still push a child to see what they’re capable of. And I use that push in a, I’m here to help you show you where your edges are, show you what you’re capable of. Because a child doesn’t always know. So sometimes a slow to warm up child needs a, I can show you this is safe. But if I push too hard or without respecting temperament and style then what happens is the child will withhold, will shutdown and there’s nothing I can do. And powerlessness in teachers and parents create a great deal of stress for parents and for children. It’s about a child, not a potty. A child is still young enough to misjudge a sequence of events, to under and overestimate the time needed to accomplish a task or to get completely thrown off by inconsequential circumstances. Oh no, I heard a loud noise when I was on the potty and now I’m in a two week accident phase. I don’t even like the word regression because regression suggests the development is linear. It’s not, it’s zig zaggy.

A child needs a hand to hold when he's uncertain and someone to show him the way over and around tricky situations. I can do that. You as teachers can do that. For parents and for children. A child is learning how other people react to mistakes and accidents. Don’t we want the children to know they’re safe and that mistakes and accidents are just things to learn how to do differently. What can we learn from that? How can I help you next time? We can help children understand that potty learning is always fun and funny as underwear. And again, it’s not always fun, but it does mean we have to take that step back when they’re feeling stress. And it means that I am more than excited to be a potty partner with a child. And that that gives you and the child a foundation to grow and learn together for years to come. So I don’t wanna give this to somebody else. I wanna be part of that partnership. Thank you and happy potty learning, and happy potty experiences.

- [Jessica] Thank you so much, Karen. This was wonderful information and a lot of really good reminders. So those of you out there listening today, I hope you have gotten a lot from this and can look at potty training a little bit differently, and look at
your kiddos and really think about what they need individually and how to make this the best experience for the child and the family and for you and everybody in your classroom. Thanks again, Karen, for sharing all of this wonderful information with us. Everyone, have a great day.