

Let's Talk School Toilets



Clemmie Telford
Author and Podcaster

School toilets may not be the first thing we think about as parents when it comes to our children's education. However, according to new research, school toilets are definitely not a great experience for our kids. Dirty toilets and wet floors, no toilet paper or soap, and a basic lack of privacy are the reality for many children. But when it comes to talking about the issue, very little chat seems to happen between us, parents, and our children.

I'm a big fan of honest conversations about tricky subjects. Some might say I'm a little bit obsessed; so much so that I wrote an entire book called 'BUT WHY?' looking at how to answer challenging questions from kids, inspired in some parts by chats that I've had with my three kids. I know what it's like to be faced with tricky conversations around issues like mental health, puberty, love, death, money and everything in between. But talking with our kids about topics that are often avoided or deemed taboo is really important. And that includes school toilets.

So, I've put together some helpful tips to make the 'toilet talk' that bit easier.

- **Find the right time to chat** - You may be wondering how on earth you even start a conversation about toilets with your child. Well, firstly, think about opportunities to make time to chat. Here's a hint – car journeys are perfect. But it can simply be any time when you're enjoying relaxed times together with your child – bath time or making dinner together are ideal. For us, family mealtimes are always great. It's also a good idea to turn off screens and remove any other distractions. Get brothers and sisters involved in the conversation too to keep the chat going and to bounce ideas off each other.
- **Make it interesting** - Start with some context "I read today that many children don't go to the toilet at school because their school toilets are unclean. What do you think about that?"
- **Make it relatable** – Talk about your own experience at school. Many parents will recall horror stories of their school toilets. Even so, according to Domestos' report, most parents today just assume school toilets are better now. Talk about your own experience, if going to the school toilet was an unpleasant experience for you, and then ask your child to share their own.
- **Talk about how you do things at home** – Many children around the world say their school toilets often don't have enough soap or paper or that items are broken or missing. Explain to your children how you always make sure the toilet at home is cleaned regularly, and that there is enough toilet paper, hand soap because it's important to be hygienic. Then ask "Do you think your school has enough toilet paper and soap? Is there enough for everyone to use? Is it as clean and tidy as our one at home?" You can also talk about how you have a lock on the toilet at home so everyone can feel comfortable and enjoy privacy. Then ask your child if they feel their toilets are private enough at school.
- **Don't let the awkward moments trip you up** – Research by social psychologist Dr Gillian Sandstrom shows that even when conversations feel stunted or awkward, they are probably going better than you think. So be patient and allow time for your child to think about their answers. Keep going!

Remember to take your time and be curious. If your child does share any concerning issues around their school toilets, help shine a light on this hidden issue. If you've had the 'toilet chat' with your child, help others to do the same by sharing this guide using #schooltoiletalk.

The good news is that having meaningful conversations is a skill that we can all get better at with practise. In this instance, by uncovering the reality that children are facing on a day-to-day basis, we can all work towards improving the sanitation and hygiene of school toilets and by extension children's quality of education.

So let's get talking about school toilets and good luck,

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