

# **Toilet Training the Reluctant Child**

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**Dear parent,**

**Chances are that you are reading this pamphlet because no matter what you do, your special little someone just can't be toilet trained. It may seem like everyone has advice to give but nothing seems to work. You may also feel like people are judging your parenting skills as well as your child. Maybe a friend has bragged about how her child was toilet trained in a day, or grandma has told you how all of her children were toilet trained shortly after their first birthdays. You are probably feeling stressed, frustrated as well as worried for your child. You are not alone. This is a very common problem in childhood and there is an end in sight. Eventually, all children are toilet trained.**

**The amount of resources out there may seem overwhelming and you probably don't know where to start. In this pamphlet, we have tried to filter through that information and put together the most common toilet training problems and the advice that seems to work best for the parents of the reluctant toilet learner. This pamphlet will not provide the magic cure for your child, but it can be a strong starting point for your journey ahead.**

**Keep in mind that toilet training is a unique opportunity to learn how your child learns and to figure out how to communicate with them effectively. It's also a chance for your child to experience the pleasure of forming goals, working towards them and achieving success. It is an opportunity to reinforce their confidence and self-esteem. Initially, toilet training may seem more like a chore than a bonding experience, but try to focus on the funny and touching moments that you'll be sharing with your child. Otherwise, you may miss them!**

**We hope that this pamphlet can help you help your child become independent and diaper-free. Good luck!**

**A note on this pamphlet**

*This is meant to be a resource for parents of the reluctant learner, but you will notice that we start from the basics. It is important to read through these even though you may have started the toilet training process months ago and you feel like you've heard it all before. The same basic principles are relevant for all children at all stages. The rest is just a matter of fine-tuning these basic ideas in the way that best fits your child. It may just be that ignoring one of these basic principles may be the source of your child's reluctance. So read on, and if you see things you've seen before, then you'll know that you've been on the right track, and if you learn something new, then it may just help your child.*

# A POO-TORIAL: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT POOP

## THE LINGO (FOR ALL AGES)

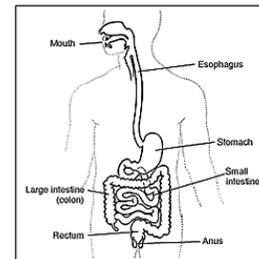
Here is a list of words to describe pee and poop that are alright to use with your child or your doctor. Make sure you use the same lingo consistently with your child so that it will always be clear what they mean.

**Poo:** poop, poo-poo, doo-doo, ca-ca, feces, fecal matter, bowel movement, BM, stool

**To poo:** defecate, have a bowel movement/BM

**Pee:** pee-pee, urine

**To pee:** urinate



## THE BIOLOGY

### A day in the life of something we eat

**Mouth to stomach:** Whenever you eat anything, you begin by breaking it down in your mouth with chewing and special enzymes in your saliva. When you swallow it down, it passes through a long tube called the esophagus into your stomach. In your stomach the food is broken down even more by other enzymes and is sterilized by stomach acid.

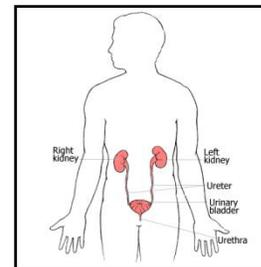
**Small intestine:** It includes the duodenum, jejunum and ileum. The main job of the small intestine is to absorb all the good stuff from the food and let the stuff (fiber) it can't use continue on to the large intestine.

**Large intestine:** It includes the ascending, transverse, descending and sigmoid colon. This is kind of the "poop-packing" part of the digestive system. It absorbs water from whatever waste happens to be passing through, and "packs" it into something we recognize as poop. The longer the waste sits in the colon (like when we are constipated), the more water is absorbed and the harder and dryer the poop becomes.

**Rectum, anus and sphincters:** The rectum is where the poop sits until we have a moment to let it out, and the anus is its door out. As the rectum fills up with poop, we get the feeling of having to go. The poop is held in by two valves in the anus called "sphincters." The internal sphincter is the "I gotta go valve" and it tells us when we need to go. We have no control over it. The external sphincter is the "not now, I'm in the kitchen" valve. This is the valve we can control to hold in our bowel movements.

### A pee-torial

We get rid of our body's extra water and many of our body's waste products by peeing them out. Our body decides what to pee out and what to keep by using two filters called kidneys. The kidneys basically filter the blood that pass through them and get rid of the junk and keep the good stuff



based on whatever the body needs at that moment. The “junk” becomes the urine. The urine passes from each kidney via a ureter to the bladder. The bladder is like the rectum because it stores the urine until we are ready to go. As it starts filling up, we get the feeling that we have to go, but we are able to hold it in using a valve called, you guessed it, a sphincter. Once we decide it’s a good time to go, we relax the sphincter and let it all out through another tube called a urethra that leads from the bladder to outside the body.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

- 🔑 **Every child is different.** There is no magic sure-fire method that will work for every child. Respond to your child’s unique needs and try to make a program fit your child instead of making your child fit into a program.
- 🔑 **Wait until your child is ready.** Don’t force the child to start just because it fits into your schedule. If he is not physically or mentally ready, then you are asking him to do something he can’t do, and both of you are going to get frustrated. It’s best to wait until your child is ready and then success will come more quickly.
- 🔑 **Be positive.** Children learn better from praise than from criticism. Imagine that you were learning a new skill and someone criticized you for not doing it perfectly every step of the way as you were learning. Chances are, you would get discouraged and lose your enthusiasm for learning.
- 🔑 **Set small, achievable goals.** This way you can baby-step your child to success and create a lot of opportunities for praise along the way.
- 🔑 **Don’t pressure your child.** You may feel a lot of pressure yourself from the school or your family, but take a deep breath and try to shut out all judgment and criticism. A reluctant toilet trainer will become even more reluctant if she feels pressure from you. Accept that this process may take many months and that your child won’t be able to relax if you are not relaxed.
- 🔑 **Accept accidents.** They are part of any learning process so expect them and make room for them.
- 🔑 **Never punish your child!** Kids will likely learn to associate using the toilet with punishment and will resist having anything to do with it. Punishment also sets the stage for family conflict and even abuse.
- 🔑 **Be consistent.** Keep the potty in the same place and the toileting routine the same every time. Your child is learning something new and it will be easier if he learns what is expected of him well. Also, make sure everyone who has a part in toilet training your child is on board with your plans.
- 🔑 **Stay involved and observe.** Your child’s needs, behaviors and abilities may change frequently and even unpredictably. What worked last week may not work today. Keep in touch with what is going on with your child and try to react by problem solving new solutions instead of keeping the old ones that don’t work.
- 🔑 **Get your family doctor or pediatrician on board.** Discuss signs of readiness with your doctor and your toilet training plan. Assess any medical problems or challenges that may make things more difficult. Make sure that constipation is not an issue before you start and that your child’s diet is set up for toileting success.
- 🔑 **The age or length of toilet training doesn’t equate to your child’s intelligence.** Don’t worry, kids that toilet train later are just as smart as other kids their age.





**The age or length of toilet training doesn't necessarily equate to your parenting skills.** Some kids are just harder to train and have different learning styles, temperaments, and life situations to deal with at the time of training.

## READINESS

### *What age is the right age?*

There is no right age because each child is different. It is more important to watch your child for signs of readiness regardless of their age. It used to be that children were expected to be trained between 2 and 3 years of age or even earlier. Ever since pediatrician Dr. Brazleton introduced the idea of waiting to train until your child is ready, it has slowly become more common to see kids trained later and later. So don't worry too much if your child is taking her time.

Here are some statistics about toilet training just for your information:

- 🕒 On average, kids are daytime bowel trained by 36 months and daytime bowel and bladder trained by 24-48 months.
- 🕒 Kids may not be nighttime bowel trained until they are 5-7 years old.
- 🕒 On average, it takes 6 months for daytime bladder training and 6-7 months for daytime stool training. It takes about 6 weeks from sitting on the potty to full toilet training.
- 🕒 The earlier kids start toilet training, the longer it takes.
- 🕒 Girls usually train faster than boys.

### ***Toilet train your newborn. Fact or Fiction?***

*In other cultures and in other times, children were toilet trained at a much earlier age than they tend to be currently in North America. You may find grandma telling stories of how all six of her children were trained shortly after their first birthdays. Or perhaps you've read about East African tribes that toilet train their infants in the first few months of life. The toilet training methods most commonly used now in North America tend to be child centered instead of parent centered and focus on waiting until the child shows signs of readiness. This not only reflects a drastic change in childcare philosophy but also how modern life has given us the luxury of diapers, disposable training pants, and time. However, you should know that while it is possible to train children before the modern average of 36 months, children usually don't develop the bowel and bladder control they need to hold in their pee and poop until about 18 months. So it is really the parents that are trained in these very early cases and not the children. The parents simply watch their children for signs that they need to go and then they hold them over a pot or put them on the potty.*

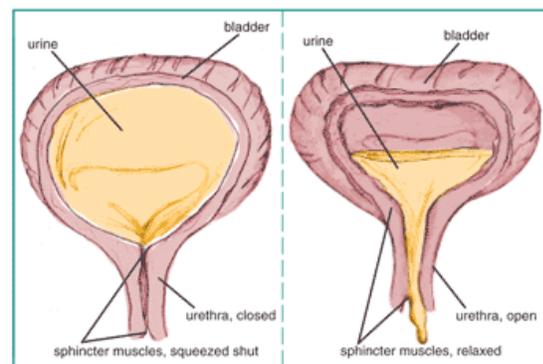
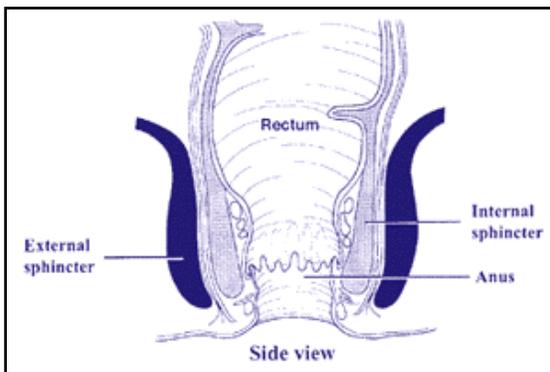
## SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS READY

Infants aren't born knowing how to pee and poop in a potty - they need to first develop the physical and mental skills necessary to be able to control such a complicated process. Your child can't properly begin toilet training or succeed at it without first developing these skills. Here is a checklist of signs to look for in your child and once you spot all of them, you should wait about 3 months before starting.

### Physical readiness

- ☑ **Sphincter control.** You might remember from the poo-torial that sphincters are valves that keep the contents of your bladder or bowel from just leaking out. Adults have the ability to control these valves, but babies don't have this control until about 18 months of age. It's a gradual process that takes place over months and even years but children can't master toilet training until they have control over their sphincters. Usually this starts with nighttime bowel control, followed by daytime bowel and bladder control. But nighttime bladder control may still take years and even older children may occasionally wet their beds because control of their sphincters is still incomplete.

☑



- ☑ **Awareness of the need to go.** Around the age of one, your child may be able to feel their bladder or rectum getting full. He may show this with facial expressions, grunting, crouching, or tugging at his diaper. You may notice it because he stops playing for a moment or go hide in a private corner, or he may just announce that he has to go.
- ☑ **Can stay dry for at least a few hours at a time.**
- ☑ **Urinates a large amount at one time.**
- ☑ **Bowel movements are well formed and fairly regular.**
- ☑ **Able to walk to the toilet.** Trying to master toilet skills when your child is just learning to walk is probably too much for her. Waiting until she is more comfortable with this skill is a better idea.
- ☑ **Stable when sitting on the toilet.**
- ☑ **Can pull their clothes on or off on their own.** Usually your child won't have the motor skills for this until about 18 months.
- ☑ **Other fine motor skills** like drawing, looking at books or playing with toys will make it easier for your child to remain interested while seated on the potty.

## Mental readiness

- ☑ **Just ask.** One of the best ways to tell if your child is emotionally ready is to see how he responds to the suggestion of using the potty. If he cries or resists the idea, it may not be the right time.
- ☑ **Follows a two step demand.** (Pick up your toy and put it in the toy box).
- ☑ **Able to communicate the need to go to toilet.**
- ☑ **Able to sit still for at least a few minutes while you read to her.**
- ☑ **Imitates behaviors and has social awareness of his peers.** This is why watching you, siblings or peers using the toilet can be very motivating for your child to use the toilet. At about the age of 2 ½ - 3, your child will usually start wanting to imitate those he admires, and particularly the same-sex parent so it may be a good idea for your daughter to go to the toilet with mommy or your son to go with daddy. You can ask a trusted friend or relative of the same gender to help you with this. An older sibling is a great person as well but this is often too embarrassing or too much to ask of that sibling.
- ☑ **Has the desire to please.** A large part of your child's motivation for toilet training will be wanting to see that you are proud of her.
- ☑ **Puts things where they belong.** This is important for understanding the concept of pee and poop belonging in the toilet.
- ☑ **Ready to do some things independently.** He is in the "I can do it!" stage.
- ☑ **She is out of the extremely resistant stage.** For example, the terrible twos.
- ☑ **Expresses an interest in toilet training.**

### *Your child's brain*

*There are a lot of steps to going to the toilet that can be complex for your child. He must learn how to recognize the cues his body is giving him, make a link between what he's physically feeling and the appropriate response, picture what he wants to do, make a plan to get there, actually get there without forgetting what he wanted to do, and then carry out the task. Young children have trouble selecting and prioritizing information they receive from the multiple sensations that reach their brain. They can be distracted easily by noises, a game that they are playing, excitement, and strong emotions. They might not be able to tune in to their body telling them they have to go if they are watching a favorite TV show, or are distracted by a loud noise in the kitchen on the way to the bathroom. Kids are also very attached to routine and they may not be able to translate their knowledge into a new environment. They might know perfectly well how to use the toilet at home, but will forget all the steps when at grandma's house or at the mall. Children are also not very skilled yet at planning for the future, so you have to remind them to go before you leave the house for a trip, even if they don't have to go urgently. Finally, they can't always vocalize what they are feeling, especially if they are scared or confused. So if it hurts when they poop or it burns when they pee, they may not be able to tell you until things get really bad.*

## **Signs that your child is not ready**

- Doesn't seem to notice when peeing or pooping in the diaper.
- There doesn't seem to be a pattern to her bowel movements.
- Peees more than once every few hours.
- Shows no interest in using the toilet.
- Becomes very upset if you even mention toilet training.
- Has a generally negative attitude.
- Is going through a lot of stress, like sleeping problems, a new baby in the home, a new caregiver or parental conflict.
- Stands at the potty and then pees on the floor.
- Resists having the diaper removed.
- Doesn't seem uncomfortable at all with a dirty diaper.

## ***Are you ready? A questionnaire to help you decide.***

- Do you feel expectations or pressure from your family or your child's other caregivers?
  - Is your motivation to toilet train the birth of another child, moving to a new home, returning to work or a day care requirement?
  - Do you have negative feelings towards diaper changes, accidents, and other issues around bathroom use? Do you find it embarrassing or disgusting to talk about?
  - Are you the type of person that loses your temper easily?
- ➔ If you said yes to any of the above, then you are probably not quite ready to start toilet training. You may want to discuss your motivations and negative feelings with your partner or a friend to figure out how you will deal with them. Re-evaluate and make sure that toilet training is motivated by your child's readiness and not because of convenience.

## ***When not to start***

- A new baby is due or has just been born.
- Your family has just moved.
- Your child has just started a new school or childcare situation.
- You and your partner are having serious problems with your relationship or have just separated.
- Your child is having nightmares or anxiety.
- Your child's sleep schedule is irregular.
- Your child is in a resistant phase.

## Tips

- ✪ Talk to your doctor at your child's two year visit about toilet training. Ask him or her to assess your child's level of readiness and make sure that constipation is not an issue.
- ✪ In the case of childhood illness, don't delay toilet training unless your child has physical or developmental problems that could possibly interfere with toileting skills. Your child should still be able to toilet train, although it may take longer because of their illness. Consult with your child's doctor about how the specific illness may interfere.

## Q&A

**How long should it take to toilet train my child?** *Every child is different so it could take days or it could take years. On average though it takes up to 6 months to become completely toilet trained after starting, most kids will get from the point of sitting on the potty to using it fairly regularly within 6 weeks.*

**I've been waiting patiently for signs of readiness in Kelly and trying not to push her, but she is now 4 years old and still doesn't seem to be ready. I'm worried about her getting teased by other kids so should I start training anyway?** *The general rule here is if it doesn't bother her then don't let it bother you too much. If your child appears to feel bad about herself because she is not toilet trained like other children around her, then it may be a good idea to start. It may be that she is ready to learn but may just need a little encouragement from you.*

**Should I bowel train or bladder train my child first?** *Since people urinate more often than they have a bowel movement, it's more likely that your child will successfully urinate while sitting on the toilet first. But it is easier to control having a bowel movement than it is to urinate, so your child may actually master bowel training first. Try to encourage your child to use the potty for peeing and pooping, just don't expect your child to master both at the same time.*

**Should I teach my son to pee standing up from the beginning?** *He may be eager to imitate older boys or male relatives very soon but first make sure he masters urinating sitting down. When he is ready to stand up, teach him to put up the toilet seat first if you are using a toilet. Expect a mess at first. You can encourage him to stand by putting a piece of toilet paper or a floating target of some sort (you can buy special targets in stores) in the toilet for target practice. Some parents even draw a target on the bottom of the bowl using a crayon. Fathers and sons can also compete to see who has better aim.*

## PREPARING TO START

### *POTTY OR TOILET?*

Your child will eventually adapt to whichever you choose, but to make it as comfortable as possible, you may want to choose specifically according to your child.

- ☞ **Potty.** For younger or smaller kids, or for the independent child that will enjoy having something entirely hers, a potty may be the best option because it is the most comfortable. She is not only less likely to fall but it helps her to push properly by allowing her to plant her feet on the ground. A potty also allows for a sense of pride and ownership because your child can help pick it out, decorate it and surround it with her favorite toys so that she can play when it's potty time.

#### Tips for the potty

- ★ You can get a potty before your child is even ready to start thinking about toilet training. This way, she can get used to it and won't be afraid when it comes to using it. However, you may want to make picking out a potty an exciting time for your child so that she looks forward to toilet training.
- ★ Let your child help you pick it out and decorate it.
- ★ You can let him explore and play with it for a while to make it a familiar object before you even introduce what it is for. Don't be surprised if he wants to use it as a hat, a crayon holder or just carry it around for a while. If it has already been used by your child for peeing or pooping, just make sure it is cleaned and disinfected well.
- ★ Make sure it is comfortable for her to sit down on and that her feet touch the ground comfortably. A padded seat and a sturdy, supported back can be very comfortable.
- ★ Make sure the potty is not too cold! Keep it next to a heater in winter, and not too close to the air conditioner in summer.
- ★ Musical potties can give your child an instant reward but can drive parents crazy if they can't stand repetitive noise. Think about this option carefully because your child may be very upset if you switch potties halfway through training.
- ★ Splash guards help with mess but children also easily injure themselves on them.
- ★ Let your child bring her favorite toys to the potty.
- ★ You can put the potty in the washroom so that your child becomes used to the idea of peeing and pooping there, but you may find it more convenient to train with the toilet in the child's bedroom or playroom. You can move it into the washroom once your child becomes more comfortable with using the toilet regularly.
- ★ Let your child know what the potty is for. Tell her that "this is your potty. It's just like the big toilet and pee and poop goes there. One day, you will put your pee and poop in the potty just like mommy and daddy do in the big toilet."
- ★ After your child goes in the potty, show him how the pee or poop goes into the adult toilet so he begins to make this association.

- ✪ Getting your child a potty doesn't mean that she will use it. Remind her gently what it is for and that pee and poop goes there. Encourage her to sit on it with clothes and play in the beginning. If she is still in diapers, suggest that she sits on the potty with a diaper when you see her straining to go.

## ***Attachable Toilet Seats***

- 👉 **Toilet.** An attachable toilet seat may be a better idea for your larger or older child interested more in imitating an older sibling or parent. It may simplify matters by skipping the step of getting used to the potty and going straight to the toilet, but children are often more afraid of adult toilets than of their own potties. So choose this option only if you are sure that your child isn't afraid of the toilet or its flush.

### Tips for attachable toilet seats

- ✪ Make sure that it fits well and is stable so that your child doesn't feel like they are going to fall.
- ✪ Make sure that there is a stool for your child so he is able to get onto the toilet and also plant his feet firmly while he pushes.
- ✪ Be careful not to flush the toilet while your child is still sitting on it. This often is very frightening for the child and can make him very afraid of the toilet.
- ✪ If your son has gotten to the stage of practicing peeing standing up, make sure that the toilet seat is fully up and that it won't fall back down on him. This has caused more than a few injuries.

## ***CLOTHING***

Clothing is actually a very important part of toilet training, so dress them for success.

- 👗 Make sure clothes are easy to remove. Dress them in clothes that are easy to pull on and off like elastic-waist pants, or skirts and dresses for girls.
- 👗 No zippers, buttons, overalls, leotards, snowsuits or complicated buckles.
- 👗 Switch from diapers to underwear or pull-ups they can take off on their own.
- 👗 Buying big kid underpants can be an exciting time for your child so let them help you pick them out. It may work to your advantage to buy underwear identical to those of an older toilet trained sibling or peer that your child idolizes. Underwear with a favorite cartoon character on it can be really handy because you can reinforce to your child that he or she doesn't want to get Superman/Barbie wet or dirty.

## TOILET TALK

- Decide on the words you will use for urine and feces with your child and then use them consistently. You can use things like pee or poop or number one and number two if you want to be more neutral. Anything is fine, but you want to choose something that other people will also understand or not be offended by because your child will eventually need to tell another adult that they need to go poop and that adult needs to know what they mean.
- Make sure you have words for all the body parts involved too. You will need to find something to describe the buttocks, vagina and penis.
- Try to be aware of any negativity or shame you might be teaching your child about going to the washroom with the vocabulary you use. Saying that it is “stinky” or “gross” may make your child ashamed of his or her toileting and it may become more difficult to toilet train. Your facial expressions might also give you away.
- Now, talk, talk, talk! Talk about using the toilet in a very matter of fact way as often as you can. Announce to your child when you have to go pee, or explain when your pet dog is doing a number two. When you see that your child is making a face like she needs to go poop or she is doing the pee-pee dance, explain that pee or poop is coming now. When she is watching you or her siblings going to the toilet, you can say that pee or poop is coming out now and that it belongs in the toilet. Show her toilets in other people’s houses or in places like the mall. This will begin to normalize the process and she will see that everyone needs to go to the toilet.
- Change soiled or wet diapers right away so that you make the link for your child that pee and poop are to be thrown out. You can reinforce how good it feels to be clean and dry once you change him out of the diaper.
- Talk about all the steps necessary to go to the toilet even before your child is able to use it. Make sure that by the time she is ready, she knows exactly what is expected:

## TOILET STEPS

- 1) First we pull down our pants.
- 2) Then we sit on the toilet until we pee or poop.
- 3) Then we wipe (girls wipe front to back).
- 4) Then we pull up our pants
- 5) Then we flush (if your child is not afraid)
- 6) Then we wash and dry our hands.

## ENSURING SUCCESS

As an adult, it is easy for you to see the benefit of using a toilet instead of a diaper, but this is not so for a child. For children it seems infinitely easier to just pee or poop in your pants. You might have a lot of work to do in order to convince them otherwise. Since kids don't respond to logical reasoning very well, you will have to use more simple things like their desire to please you, playing fun games and using rewards as incentives. The two most important things you have to remember throughout the process are **FUN** and **PRAISE**. The second that toilet training becomes a negative or really boring experience, your child will lose interest or begin to resist. Keep reading for ideas on how to maximize **FUN** and **PRAISE**.

### *FUN*

-  Whatever it is your child likes to do: read, colour, chat, play with a transformer or Barbie, play a hand-held video game, sing a song, or even play the guitar, let her do it on the toilet. It will make it a more fun place to be and make it more likely that she will sit long enough to be successful in her goals. Have certain fun toys or games be only for the toilet or potty.
-  Stay with them while your child is sitting on the potty or toilet, having your company and attention is sometimes the most fun.
-  Don't encourage your child to sit for more than 5 minutes or so at a time. It should be fun but it's not just about playtime so move on to the playroom if nothing is happening.
-  Create an imaginative story that stars your child and is based on a toilet task. You can even use pictures of your child going to the potty, flushing, washing his hands, your proud smile and even the celebrated final product in the potty or toilet to illustrate your story with.
-  Magical thinking begins around age 3 and you can use it to your advantage. If your child is afraid of using the toilet because she thinks she'll fall in, you can ask her to bring a favorite toy in to make sure she won't fall in.
-  If your kid says poop won't come out but your child isn't constipated, you can do a special poo dance to help it come out.
-  Make a game of it. When looking at a picture book with your child and you spot a picture of a fish, ask your child how he thinks the fish would swim to the bathroom. Would it be fast or slow? Would it wiggle its tail? Would it swim in a straight line or in a curvy line? Then act it out with your child all the way to the bathroom and onto the toilet or potty.
-  Bring in your child's imaginary friend to help with any steps or fears she may have particular trouble with. Or just for company.
-  Encourage him to use a doll or toy to act out and practice the steps of toilet training. This is also a very powerful teaching tool, more so even than explaining the steps directly.
-  Let your child know how fun it can be to become a "big kid" because big kids can do things like going to movies, staying up later or wearing big kid undies.

- 🌸 Ask your child to draw a picture of himself as a potty training big boy wearing big boy undies.
- 🌸 Make it so the bathroom doesn't appear off-limits for kids. Keep the door open when no one is in it, and if you're not too modest, when you're using it as well. Make special efforts to go into the washroom with your child as often as possible to wash hands, restock toilet paper or towels, to brush teeth etc. Make it a familiar and friendly place.
- 🌸 Be silly and creative and share laughs with your child.

## *PRAISE*

For the most part, children live for your praise. A lot of what they do is to get your positive attention for something that they have done that pleases you. All toilet training manuals seem to agree that praise is an essential part of successful toilet training. Where they differ is in how much praise to give. Some manuals recommend showering your child with praise every time they succeed in a toilet training goal, no matter how small. Other manuals say that going over the top with enthusiasm and excitement can scare the child and he will feel a lot of pressure as a result. The manuals that support the low-key praise approach still recommend praising your child, but in a more relaxed manner. They suggest that your child's motivation should be the feeling of accomplishment for independent toileting tasks, rather than your exaggerated response.

So, how much praise should you give? The right answer is that it depends on your child. If your child loves being the centre of attention, then they will respond really well to oodles of praise. If your child is very private, shy, tends to get startled easily or is more the strong, silent type, you may want to tone your praise down. A simple "good for you honey. You had a poop in the potty all by yourself" and a smile will do.

Here are some more tips for giving praise the right way:

- ✪ Acknowledge toileting accomplishments every step of the way. Even if it is just for sitting down on the potty with the diaper on for a minute, let your child know you are proud of her. If she happens to pee in the potty while she is just practicing bare bottom sitting, then give her praise for that too. It will help reinforce the idea that going in the toilet is something good and something that she wants to do in the future on purpose to get even more praise and more attention.
- ✪ Making a number of achievable goals will give you more opportunities to praise and encourage your child to keep succeeding. Start small and take it slowly.
- ✪ Don't forget to keep praising your child throughout toilet training. If you get bored of it, your child may get bored of toilet training.
- ✪ If your child doesn't mind being the centre of attention, make a point to brag to relatives, friends or even the doctor about your child's successes so that your child can hear. The more people that are proud of him, the greater the incentive.

## *REWARDS*

Some parents like to use little rewards to motivate their children even more. This can be a particularly good choice especially for the reluctant child, or if praise just doesn't seem to be doing the trick. Figure out the step that your child is trying to learn and let your

child know that you will be giving her a reward every time she makes an effort to achieve this goal. Rewards shouldn't just be for success, but for effort. You can give your child an extra reward for trying and succeeding, or something extra special for a good day or week. Make sure that your child knows what will get her a reward so that she can try to work towards perfecting the task. As your child gets better at one task, move on the next one and begin to give rewards for that instead. Remember, just as with praise, make sure you create small achievable goals so that your child can feel good about succeeding so often.

Incentives or rewards are most effective if they are given right after your child's achievement, if they are age appropriate, and provided consistently after every time your child is successful achieving their goal. Your child should have access to the rewards you have selected only after appropriate toileting and not on an every day basis.

- ☞ Remember to reward your child for having a bowel movement on the toilet or potty rather than having clean pants or diapers, because this can cause your child to hold in stool.

## Good rewards

- 🎁 **Praise.** This is the best encouragement for your child to keep doing whatever it is he's doing to make you so proud. So don't give up on it just because you now have rewards.
- 🎁 **A star chart.** Keep a chart by the toilet and set realistic goals that you would like your child to achieve. If you are struggling with getting her to sit on the toilet for even one minute once a day, tell her she will get a sticker every time she does this. If you are at the stage of getting her to try to make it to the toilet every time she has to poop, tell her she will get a sticker every time she sits down on the toilet when she feels the urge to go, or if your child is at the next step, give her a sticker every time she successfully poops in the toilet. You can give her an extra sticker or a larger sticker for having a successfully toileted, completely clean day and then later on, a prize or something a bit more special for a really good week. Whatever your current goals, let your child know how the chart works and what she will get a sticker for. Some parents use a star chart for all daily chores and achievements like brushing teeth, cleaning up toys when playtime is over, or washing hands before dinner. This puts going to the toilet into context as just another everyday skill to master.
- 🎁 **Small things** like stickers or picking from a box of prizes you have filled up with cheap items from the dollar store. Small items include gum, colored straws, small toys like a doll, action figure, car, new lego piece, glittery crayon, photo of pet, or chap stick. Just make sure that they are not easily swallowed!
- 🎁 Some parents use M&M's, cookies, or a healthy snack as a reward. **Be careful!** You may want to avoid items that aren't nutritious or introducing the idea of food as a reward entirely. Using food as a reward may be one of the causes of obesity. However, this may be the only thing that gets your reluctant child going.
- 🎁 Fill up jar or container with clanky chips or tokens and once they get a certain amount they can get an agreed upon reward. For example, 3 chips gets them a small reward.

- 🎁 **Grab bags** where you wrap smaller items or throw a few into a paper bag and leave them in a larger bag, basket or box for your child to choose when he has received a certain amount of stars/stickers/checks/tokens.
- 🎁 **Extra special time with you.** For example, an extra bed time story, a card game, a bike ride at the park, playing a board game, a walk after dinner, a video together. Make sure your child knows it's extra time. You can say "this extra \_\_\_\_\_ time is because you did a good job of \_\_\_\_\_ today. I am so proud of you." Don't withhold normal activities or fun that you would have with your child if she is not doing well with a toilet training task. This can have a very negative effect on a child's development, and it is a part of childhood that all children deserve even if they are struggling to learn something new.
- 🎁 **Special privileges.** For older kids, special privileges might work well. For example, going to bed 15 minutes later, or extra TV or computer time.

## Bad rewards

- 🚫 **Withholding love.** Although praise and hugs are good rewards, withholding your attention or love unless your child successfully performs can be damaging to his development.
- 🚫 **Really expensive items** that are out of proportion to their accomplishment. A reward that is too big may distract the child from the goal. Instead of seeing toilet success as a positive experience, your child may begin to see going to the toilet as a way to get things out of you.
- 🚫 **Future rewards.** Ideas of large prizes in the future especially for smaller kids who have very little concept of time will not be as effective as immediate small rewards right away. You can reward your child with one slightly larger reward if they've had a good week but she won't be able to understand the concept of working towards a long term goal like a trip to Disneyland or a new bicycle.
- 🚫 **Food rewards:** Although little treats like M&Ms could be a good immediate reward for your child, things like fatty foods or entire meals are definitely a bad idea. Several obesity experts have commented that food is too often used as a reward so when one is unconsciously seeking a reward, they turn to food whether they are hungry or not.



**PROMOTE PRAISE AND FUN**



**AVOID PUNISHMENT AND CONFLICT**

## ACCEPTING ACCIDENTS AND AVOIDING PUNISHMENT

Remember that you are going through a process now of trying to convince (one would even go so far as to say *trick*) your child to do something that you think is logical but that he may view as unnecessarily complicated. In order to trick him properly, you're going to have to play it really cool and make it seem as easy, stress-free, relaxed and fun as possible. You're going to have to give toilet training the appearance of a really cool part of being a big kid. You'll have to find the perfect balance of not making too big a deal out of it to avoid the sense of pressure and to give it its proper place among all of the other tasks people need to perform from day to day, but making just big enough of a deal to make it seem worthwhile and fun.

Anything at all that makes the process seem negative or overly stressful will throw your child off, and you may even have to give it a rest for a few months and return to it when both you and your child are ready to try again. This is why the idea of promoting praise and fun and avoiding punishment and conflict is so important. Let this be your mantra. Repeat it to yourself as you train, especially in the difficult moments. If there is one major point to keep in mind at all times when you're sifting through all of the toilet training advice flying at you, this is the main one. If you baby step your way to success with this mantra in your mind, then you will be in great shape.

One way to avoid negativity is to modify your time-lines. Accept that this may take a long time and that there will definitely be accidents along the way. If you expect that your child will be toilet trained perfectly in one day, then you're setting yourself up for feeling frustrated and disappointed, and your little one will pick up on those feelings and feel pretty awful about it. Maybe even to the point that she refuses to toilet train. So do yourself a favor and expect this to be a process that takes many months. On average, kids will start making progress by 6 months, but it can take even longer if they struggle with behavioral problems or constipation. However, it's a good idea to seek out the help of your family doctor or pediatrician at 6 months if you feel your child is making no progress.

Accept and plan for accidents and messes. You can put a plastic sheet on the bed, her favorite spot on the floor where she plays, or even on the car seat. Bring toilet wipes, a change of clothes, or any other cleaning supplies you might need when you go on outings, and keep them close at hand at home. Teach your child to ask for a toilet on outings when she needs one and to recognize the men's and women's signals on public restrooms so she knows to ask when she sees the symbols.

Clean up the messes in a matter of fact way. When your child has an accident, don't punish her. Just explain to her "Oops. You had a poop on the floor because you were playing and forgot to go to the potty. Next time you feel like you have to poop, you can go to the toilet." Then you can get her to help you clean up. Instead of just asking her to tell you or another adult next time she has to go, you can put your hand on her lower stomach and press gently and let her know "next time you have that funny feeling right here that means you have to go, so tell a grown-up right away."

Accidents will seem to happen at the worst times. That's because when the family is rushed, stressed or in a foreign environment, the child will feel most stressed and

toileting concerns may be the first to go out the window. Remember that accidents are usually real accidents – the child forgets, gets distracted, is upset, or is embarrassed to use a toilet outside the home. Sometimes accidents can also be a result of your child testing boundaries, which is a normal part of childhood. Reacting calmly to accidents and treating them as just that will help your child understand that they are just a normal part of learning any new skill and help her to continue trying to master a skill instead of getting caught up in feelings of shame, failure, anxiety, or rebellion.

If your child is having more accidents than usual, it's ok to return to training pants for a few days, but let her know it's for support not punishment. Don't scold or tease your child and stop siblings from doing the same.

### Why accidents happen

- **The daydreamer** – some kids need to be reminded a bit more often because they get so wrapped up in what they are doing.
- **The active kid** – some kids are so into physical activity, that the thought of sitting down for even a few minutes at a time is unreasonable to them.
- **The shy kid** – this child won't go to the potty because it is placed in the living room and not in a private place.
- **The independent kid** – wants to assert control over his own routine and refuses to recognize he has to go until it's too late.

*Remember, even if your child is older and has been struggling with toilet training for many years, it's a good idea to read through the basic principles of toilet training to make sure you aren't missing any important concepts that could help your child.*

## STARTING

### READY, SET, GO!



Now that your child has shown the signs of readiness, you've chosen between a potty or toilet seat adaptor, you have all the rewards ready, and you've started to talk his ear off about going to the toilet and the steps involved, it's time to start.

Try to start when it's less likely that there will be a disruption at home. A week before Christmas, after the birth of a new baby, or in the winter when you have to get your kid in and out of a snowsuit is probably not the best time. Summer tends to be an easier time because there are less clothes to deal with and many parents have more time off of work.

It's a good idea to watch your child for a few weeks before you start to figure out a pattern to his toileting schedule. Ask all of your child's caregivers to help with this task. If your child doesn't make a big show of when he has bowel movements and you can't tell if he's gone, do a quick diaper check every hour or so and write down the times when it's full. This step may seem tedious but will be very helpful when you start training.

You will find that there are many books out there with many methods, but a lot of them are very similar and most are based on the child-centred method first introduced by pediatrician, Dr. Brazelton. Basically, it involves starting only when you see signs of readiness in your child and then setting small, achievable goals that your child masters slowly and with a lot of praise along the way. It involves baby stepping it all the way to success. Although you may be tempted to enroll your child in a one-day crash course, this is probably not the way to go for the reluctant child and it will not be discussed in this manual. So, accept that the process might be slow and steady and toilet training will eventually be achieved.

#### ***Toilet train in just one day. Fact or fiction?***

*The toilet train in just one day method is definitely a toilet training best seller at bookstores. However, studies have reported only minimal success unless the caretakers have access to professional supervision in addition to the book. Younger kids definitely require more time. The program is not recommended for parents who may have a bit more difficulty holding their temper or remaining patient throughout stressful tasks. The method is very demanding of both the child and the parent and it can potentially be a set up for huge power struggles, temper tantrums, feelings of failure, and even abusive behavior towards children. This is not to say that it isn't possible, just that it won't be the right method for all children at all times. It might even make your child resistant to the whole process as opposed to miraculously training them in one day. Besides, if you have already tried to toilet train your reluctant child, perhaps even several times, this aggressive method will not be the one to solve your problems. A child that is already reluctant will require a more gentle approach that takes more time and patience.*

## *A MENU OF CHOICES*

The reason that there are so many toilet training books out there is because each child will respond best to a different method. As a parent, it is not your job to go out and buy every book and find the perfect method for your child. Basically, any method will be fine as long as it sticks to the basic principles of allowing independence and accepting accidents; avoiding negativity, force, and punishment; and using positivity, praise and fun. So as you read, you will find that you are not being presented with the perfect sure-fire training method for even the most difficult of children, but a menu of choices that will get you to the same point no matter which one you choose. Choose what seems to fit best with your unique child, stick with it, and make adjustments accordingly. The section following this will get even more specific and discuss some of the most common problems encountered along the way with reluctant learners and some of the possible solutions.

## *INTRODUCING THE IDEA*

All of the toilet training books start with the idea of “potty talking” to your child at any and every opportunity you get - even before the signs of readiness are there. This is explained in more detail in the “Potty Talk” section of the website. Basically, you want your child to become familiar with this idea of peeing and pooping as a natural thing that everyone does, and that pee and poop go in the toilet. By the time you’re ready to start, hopefully you will have told your child so much and demonstrated using toys, yourself, siblings and pets. Hopefully your child will already know the steps involved like the back of his hand. By talking about it, you will also encourage your child to tune in to his own body sensations.

## *THE BASIC IDEA*

All toilet training plans aim to get your child to the same point of toileting independently. What this will involve is your child being able to tune into her own body telling her that she has to pee or poop, communicating to an adult that she has to go, holding it in until she makes it to the toilet, pulling down her pants, sitting on the toilet long enough to go, wiping properly, flushing, and finally washing and drying her hands. No child will start by having all of these skills and will simply be able to accomplish them once you announce that it’s time to be toilet trained. You have to build each skill bit by bit, baby step by baby step. What changes is how quickly your child is able to take these steps. For some children, parents can just take off their diapers on toilet training day and once they feel the shock of urine running down their leg, they will start warning the parents every time and easily make it to the potty. Other kids may have a tantrum if they are even asked to sit on the toilet or potty. Clearly, the parents of these children will have to set different goals to achieve in different amounts of time.

The basic steps are presented below. It is up to you how exactly you approach them and how much time you think your child will need to achieve them.

## DIAPERS OFF

Eventually, the goal is to have your child out of diapers and into underwear, and there are certainly many ways to go about it:

- ▽ **From diapers straight to underwear.** Some parents, when they decide the time is right to toilet train, decide to just remove the diapers altogether and go right to the underwear stage. Parents that do this are usually very prepared to accept accidents during this period because they are certainly inevitable. If you decide to do this, make sure you have cleaning supplies at hand to clean up both your child's bottom and the floor. You may want to put a sheet of plastic or a folded towel on the couch or floor under your child's bottom to make it a bit easier to clean. A plastic cover sheet for the car seat and for the bed is also recommended although children may not develop the bladder control to be nighttime bladder trained until they are 6 or 7 years old. You may want to use pull-ups at night until they have mastered daytime training and seem ready to tackle the next step.
- ☺ **Pros.** Children who remain in diapers or pull-ups when they are training may not be able to feel when they are wet because it is immediately absorbed by the diaper. Sometimes the unpleasantness of feeling the wetness on their skin will drive home the desire to stay dry. During this training period, you will want to be extra vigilant of your child's signs that she has to go and alert her to these feelings if she is not quite tuning in to them. Try to give her a chance to recognize them on her own. If she has an accident because she was too busy playing or watching TV, you can just say "you had a poop on the floor because you were busy watching TV and you didn't pay attention. When you feel like you have to poop, it's important to stop what you're doing and go to the potty. I know you'll remember next time. Now let's clean up together." This can be a great way to go about things if your child is particularly independent and will want to take charge of figuring out on her own when she has to go. Underwear also has the added benefit of being easy to pull up and down. Children are usually proud to wear them, especially if they picked them out or they have a favorite cartoon character on them.
- ☹ **Cons.** This method can simply be too much too fast for the child that prefers routine and is very comfortable in diapers or pull-ups. You may already know this about your child, and certainly children that are a bit more reluctant may require a bit more time in diapers or pull-ups rather than having them taken away immediately. You will certainly know by your child's reaction to this, and if he makes a fuss, you should never force it on him to graduate to a step he's not quite ready for. You may also prefer not to deal with so many accidents throughout the process of learning, and pull-ups may seem like a much cleaner alternative.
- ▽ **Daily decisions.** Some parents allow children to decide daily if they would like to wear underwear or training pants. This might be good for very independent children, but more difficult for ones who love routine and schedules.

- ▽ **Gradual introduction to underwear.** Start off your child with some toilet training a week before starting training by putting him into underwear for only a few hours a day. This is best done during a window of likely dryness so you can cheer the dryness. You can slowly increase the length of time in underwear each day, as long as your child is still able to stay dry for that long. The point is not to train him but to motivate him by applauding staying dry in his new underwear - he is only able to achieve at this stage because you've chosen the dryness period so well. You can always take the underwear off and put him on the potty or into a pull-up or diaper (whatever he's used to) to pee or poop if he's showing you signs and then put him back in the underwear.
  
- ▽ **Diaper-free training period.** In this method, the potty is placed in the child's room or play area. All diapers and pants are removed for brief periods of time and you point out to your child whenever she pees or poops. You can encourage your child periodically to go alone to the toilet if she so desires. The ability to perform alone becomes an exciting accomplishment and many children take over the function entirely at this point. Training pants are introduced at this time.
  
- ▽ **The pull-up period.** Some parents decide to use pull-ups while their child is trying to perfect using the toilet on their own.
  - ☺ **Pros.** Using pull-ups in the stage between diapers and underwear can be a nice transition for some kids. It allows them to enjoy some big-kid status by being able to pull their pants up and down all on their own, while still giving them the comfort of being able to make mistakes without too much of a mess. This is also often more convenient for parents in terms of clean ups.
  
  - ☹ **Cons.** Pull-ups are very absorbent and children might not be as in tune with their bodily functions because they won't get the unpleasant feeling of being wet. Children can also become dependent on pull-ups if they wear them for a long time. They simply become comfortable with going in their pull-ups instead of using the toilet and don't see much reason in trying.
  
- ▽ **The child that doesn't want to get out of diapers.** Some children make a fuss when you try to take them out of their diapers and into pull-ups or underwear. Others have already graduated to the pull-up or underwear stage but are now demanding to be put back in their diapers. What most experts seem to say about this, is avoid taking steps backwards because your child will lose confidence in what she has already accomplished. However, you can certainly slow down the process and make her training more pleasant so she doesn't feel so much pressure. She is clearly feeling that things are going too fast and by asking for diapers she is asking you to slow down. Children often go through stages of wanting to regress to being coddled like a baby. This can be because of a stressful event, the arrival of a new baby so that now they have to compete for their parents' attention, and sometimes "just because." If your child absolutely demands to wear diapers, give in. One thing that the experts seem to say again and again is to avoid power struggles. The more resistance you give your child, the more resistant your child becomes. It's the story of Romeo and Juliet all over again. Your kid will only want to wear those diapers more if you tell her she can't, so just let her have her experiment with regression to infancy or unwillingness to step into the unknown territory of "big-kidhood". What you can do

is provide your child with encouragement by letting her know all the great things that big kids get to do. Then try to entice her over to pull-ups or underwear by showering her with praise and applause whenever she makes a big kid step. Don't worry, she will eventually get there. You can just try to make it as conflict free as possible.

## *PUTTING IT TOGETHER*

Whether bare-bottomed, in underwear or pull-ups, you now want to get your child to somehow go on the potty whenever he has to go. This is the whole challenge. Basically, it begins with trying to get your kid in touch with three things at once: 1) sensing that he has to go, 2) alerting you on time and then, 3) sitting on the potty or toilet to go. The first two tasks can be worked on while you perfect the third task.

## *AWARENESS OF HAVING TO GO AND COMMUNICATING IT*

Basically, making sure that your child is in touch with having to go and being able to communicate it involves the following:

- Praise whenever your child lets you know somehow that she has to go. Knowing that doing something so simple brings such a reward with it will likely make your child eager to tell you whenever possible. You can also just let your child know that she gets an actual reward for telling you. It can be the first sticker to work on in her sticker chart.
- If your child accidentally forgets to tell you or is so involved in an activity that he simply doesn't tune in to this feeling, don't punish him. Just point out how he can be successful next time and tell him you know he can do it. "You forgot to tell mommy because you were playing a game. Next time you feel the same feeling in your tummy I know you will stop and tell me when you have to go." You can press on his lower stomach to remind him where he will feel it.
- Watch your child carefully for signs that she has to go. As mentioned before, this includes facial expressions, grunting, crouching, tugging at the diaper, freezing, doing a dance, or hiding in a corner to go. When you see these signs, you want to explain to her what is happening. "That feeling means you have to pee/poop. Next time tell me when you feel it happening." For more information see [READINESS](#)
- Talk to your child about pee and poop and using the toilet whenever the opportunity presents itself. This was already mentioned above, but it is very important. Whenever your child, you, your partner, a sibling, a pet, a character in a book or a video is using the toilet, explain to your child what is happening. He will soon begin to pay attention to his pee and poop and the sensations that come with it.
- If your child is in diapers or pull-ups, you may want to put a folded handkerchief in there to make them less absorbent. That way, she will be able to feel the wetness better and respond to it.

## *TOILET SITS*

As you work on encouraging your child's awareness and communication of having to go, you want to get him comfortable with sitting on the potty or toilet. The process of getting from just sitting on the potty to actually using it is a gradual one that should go only as fast as is comfortable for your child. Usually the steps involve the following:

**Clothed sits.** The process should begin with a gentle introduction to sitting on the potty or the toilet with all the clothes on. It is important that your child starts fully clothed because a cold seat on a bare bottom can be discouraging. There are no expectations to go pee or poop at this time, just a few minutes here and there of your child sitting on the toilet or potty while playing or drawing, with you keeping her company. You can read your child a book or sing to her, especially about the topic of using a toilet. To prepare her for what's coming, you can say "You are sitting on your potty/toilet now. One day you will pee and poop in there." Try to coordinate these times when a parent, caregiver or sibling is using the toilet because it encourages imitation. Let the child leave at any time. There should never be any coercion or pressure to stay. The most important part of the clothed sits process is just to make the whole process as comfortable and fun as possible, while introducing the idea of regular toilet sits. If there is any pressure or force to try to get her to sit she will begin to feel negatively towards sitting on the potty or toilet. Exactly the opposite of what you want to do. If you think of it a chair with a hole in it is a very odd seat and like no other she has sat on! It is VERY IMPORTANT that you avoid putting any kind of pressure on her to perform and that they are just sits. This part is just about getting comfortable on this new, strange seat. Do this for about a week or until you think she is ready for the next step.

**Bare bottom sits.** Now you want to do the same thing as in the clothed sits only with a bare bottom. Keep making the toilet a fun and comfortable place to be with toys, games, books and your attention. This stage is not only about getting used to the feeling of a bare bottom on the toilet seat, but about slowly making the transition to scheduled sits. Once again, you're not expecting anything from this stage except for increasing your child's comfort level. You don't expect to catch pees or poops at this point. If they happen to come out while your child is sitting there, you can applaud him and praise him to try to raise enthusiasm for doing it on his own. Read the next scheduled sit section and slowly start shaping the pressure-free bare bottom sits to scheduled sits.

**The transition from bare bottom sits to scheduled sits.** Routine is introduced gradually to avoid setting up fears of strangeness. As your child's interest grows in using a potty or toilet, you can take her to the toilet a second time during the day when her diapers or pull-ups are soiled. This is in addition to the bare bottom sits where it is just about sitting. Then, you can change the diaper or pull-up on the seat and drop the contents into the potty or toilet, explaining again the purpose of the chair. Once explained, a demonstration of disposing of feces or urine into the adult toilet can be undertaken. If your child is willing, take her to the potty or toilet several times a day to catch the urine or stool.

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### **Teaching your child how to push**

*Make sure that your child is in a comfortable position, with his feet slightly apart and supported well by either the floor or a stool. He should be taught to lean forward slightly and bear down by blowing up a balloon, into a straw, or watching family members straining. Some kids when they strain actually push their sphincter shut, so try to make sure it is not the case.*

usually want to start doing is getting your now relaxed, bare-bottom potty sitter to start sitting during times that she is most likely to successfully pee or poop on the potty, and to be able to sit long enough for this to happen. Try to get the sits somewhere between 2-5 minutes and don't make your child sit any longer than that or don't force her to sit for any length of time if she really doesn't want to. The way that you schedule the sits really depends on your child's schedule and yours. The ideal situation is that your child sits during times when she is most likely to go. This includes after waking up, after a nap, before leaving in the morning, before going to bed, before getting into the car, while mom or dad make dinner, before a bath, after a bath, during nighttime washup, and 15-20 minutes after meals. Going 15-20 minutes after meals makes use of the "gastro-colic reflex". People generally need to poop within half hour after eating due to the fact the intestinal tract is turned on by eating along with the mild exercise of getting up from the table. However, if you already know your child's toileting schedule, make sure you sit your child at these times. Maybe you want to get her used to the preschool's or kindergarten's schedule so that it will be easier on her when she starts. Some experts even recommend a sit every hour or two. Choose times that work best for your child.

Scheduled toileting also has the goal of being able to habituate the rectum to empty at regular intervals. So sticking to whatever schedule you pick is important because your child's bowel will eventually get trained to go at certain times. Kids also tend to be more comfortable with schedules and they will appreciate knowing what is expected of them throughout the day.

Most children probably won't be enthusiastic about going from casual bare-bottom sits to a rigid sitting schedule with sits of 5 minutes at a time. So move towards this goal only as fast as your child will allow. If your child is willing, get her to sit for 2-5 minutes at a time at "toilet times." Set an egg timer so she knows how long that is and let her know that she will get a sticker/token/reward when the timer is up. Make sure that you make it fun in the meantime and that you praise her when it's done in addition to the reward. You can give the reward first for just sitting during those times, and when your child becomes more and more comfortable with that idea, you can give a sticker or reward if she has a pee or poop while sitting.

If your child is extremely resistant and impatient with the whole idea, start off with small goals of sitting once a day for 2 minutes or at "toilet times" for only 1 minute at a time. Give her the reward or sticker for whatever step it is that she's working on, no matter how far away it may seem from actually peeing or pooping on the toilet. To get to the pooping or peeing stage, you may have to start with your child in pull-ups sitting on the toilet with the lid down, then move towards sitting with the lid up, and then you can even cut a hole in the pull-ups for her toilet sits before she gets to the last bare bottom

pooping stage. If she absolutely refuses to even sit for a second, just work on her becoming more comfortable in the bathroom by allowing her to play there for a while. Otherwise, you may just want to put off the training for a few months until she is less resistant. In those months continue to talk about toileting in a positive way.

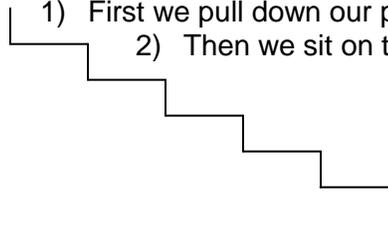
This phase has two goals: getting used to a toilet schedule, and trying to catch pee or poop in the potty. It is “catching” pee or poop in the potty because you are not yet expecting your child to be fully successful with sensing when he has to go, communicating it, and then going all on his own.

**Child-led sits.** Slowly you and your child will start working towards her toileting independence and going when she tells you she needs to go. As your child becomes more familiar with the concept of putting pee and poop where they belong, and with being rewarded when she successfully completes any of the toilet training tasks, she will be more likely to tell you when she has to go, to lead you to the toilet, and to go all on her own. This is wonderful and exactly what you want to happen. It is important to keep the scheduled sits too so that your child develops good toileting habits, trains her bowels and decreases her chance of having accidents.

When you begin toilet training, you will have asked your child to tell you when she has to go to the toilet. Praise her for telling you and let her lead you to the toilet when this happens. At first she may let you know only after it's too late and has already gone in her diapers. Still praise her for knowing when she had to go and say that next time you know she'll tell you before it happens. If your child isn't good at telling you when she needs to go, bring her to the toilet during scheduled sits or when she's squirming as if she needs to go, and ask her if she wants to go. If you want to play it a bit cooler or tend to get a “no” whenever you ask a question, you can just prompt her by asking, “It's after lunch, what time is it?” and she can respond “Potty time!” Having a little bell that goes off to signal toilet times can also do the trick. This can remove the power issue away from you to the timer. Whatever you do, don't barrage your child by asking her every half hour if she needs to go to the washroom. She will likely feel the pressure of your insistent questioning and become resistant to it entirely. Instead, try to focus on creating a consistent eating, sleeping and toileting schedule for your child so that she can achieve regular toilet times and be able to tune it to when she has to go.

**All the other stuff.** There are many more steps involved with toilet training and you want to make sure that your child gets the whole routine down. Talk him through the steps every time – at first in “the introducing the idea” period with a stuffed animal or even your own demonstration, and then as he is going through all the steps of training. Repeat these six steps over and over again. Make them part of the toileting routine. You can prompt your child about the next step, and applaud him when he gets it right. Your child will soon be able to chant them all on his own. If your steps are a bit different because you are using a potty or your child is afraid of flushing, make your own steps to chant. Here are the basic steps again:

## TOILET STEPS

- 1) First we pull down our pants.
  - 2) Then we sit on the toilet until we pee or poop.
- 

- 3) Then we wipe (girls wipe front to back).
- 4) Then we pull up our pants.
- 5) Then we flush
- 6) Then we wash and dry our hands.

Make sure you teach your child properly how to complete the other tasks. Show him how to pull down his pants so they don't get messy while he sits. Make sure you teach him how to wipe properly. Show him how to rip off just enough squares for the job (and not the whole roll!) First you can start off by doing it for your child, then you can do it together, then move on to just guiding them at the beginning of the step, and then finally letting him do it on his own.

**Flushing:** Your child can be a flushing enthusiast and really want to flush on his own. Maybe he loves waving bye-bye to his pee or poop. However, many children are afraid of the large noise and think that they might be flushed down with their products. Some children become incredibly proud of the poop that they make and find it absurd that you would want to flush it away, so they get mad when you even try. If this is the case, you may want to wait until your child is gone to flush the toilet. Very definitely, don't ever flush the toilet while your child is on it. The splashing and the big noises are sure to be a big scare. Finally, make sure that your child washes and dries his hands every time. Make it part of the routine even before successful sits.

It's important to start off with guidance and then move on to your child trying it out on his own so he has that feeling of independence and a job well done. You may want to step back once he understands the basic steps and let him be a bit clumsy for a while with ripping off the toilet paper unevenly or pulling up his pants a bit crooked. (However, make sure that he wipes his bottom and washes his hands properly for hygiene reasons). It's important to let him know that practice makes perfect and that he is allowed to make mistakes while he learns. If you step in too often and keep telling him he did something wrong, he may get discouraged with his new-found skills.

## *HOW TO KEEP GOING*

Even though it seems as if your child has finally got it, this doesn't mean you can give up. You can certainly phase out the rewards and constant praise, but don't give it up altogether. Make sure that she still knows that you're proud of her for learning something so hard. And don't expect perfection from here on in. It is perfectly normal for kids to have accidents occasionally and even regress for a few days or even a month. Everyone has their rough patches. Here are some tips on how to keep the success going:

- ☞ Once your child has been successfully using the potty for at least a week, you can graduate her to big kid underwear if you haven't already. However, don't rush your child out of diapers or force her to wear soiled diapers.
- ☞ Once the potty chair has been mastered for a while, your child can graduate to the regular toilet with a toilet seat adapter and a step stool.

- ⚡ After bowel training is complete, boys can be taught to stand for urination. See the [pee](#) standing up on how to do this.
- ⚡ Wait to start nighttime bladder training until your child develops the ability to control her bowel and bladder function during the day. When your child expresses an interest in night training, you can start by making sure she has used the potty before going to bed and wake her at your bedtime to offer her the opportunity to go to the toilet. It is often useful to place a potty painted with glow in the dark paint by your child's bed.

## WHEN TO STOP

Provide gentle but steady pressure without running into arguments or screaming matches. Maintain a sense of humor and try to appear relaxed even though you might be at the end of your rope. Try to avoid going back to diapers and sending mixed messages if possible. However, if you find any mention of the toilet meets with a resistant child and constant temper tantrums for weeks on end, it is probably a good idea to step back for a moment and delay toilet training for a few months until your child is more cooperative. Keep talking to him about toilet training and pointing out what is happening when he does his pee-pee dance or makes his I-gotta-poop face. When you are cleaning out his diaper or pull-up, explain how pee and poop goes in the toilet in a straight forward manner, but don't make your child feel bad and don't nag him about it. He should get the message that peeing and pooping in the toilet is a normal every day task that big people do, and it's ok if he's not ready yet.

If training doesn't seem to be going anywhere, try to keep a toileting journal for a few weeks before taking a break. It may just be that you haven't found the right toilet times for your child. But if it is proving to be battle with no success, then it should be abandoned and reintroduced a few months later. Keep in mind that the program was abandoned just because the timing wasn't right and that it will be reintroduced later.

## Tips

- ⊛ A week before the start date, get your child excited for the training. Put the stickers up on the fridge with a magnet or leave the rewards on the kitchen counter to entice your child to ask what they are for.
- ⊛ Try to have an open-door policy with the toilet to promote the idea that peeing and pooping is something that everyone does, and so that your child can become more familiar with the toileting steps.
- ⊛ Some kids happily sit on the potty at school or nursery but refuse to sit at home. You can borrow the school potty or you can enlist the help of any neighbouring small kids with their potties and have "potty parties" to encourage your child. *Potty Train Your child in Just One Day* is absolutely packed with ideas for potty parties.
- ⊛ Running water while your child is seated on the toilet can help stimulate her urge to go. However, you may want to avoid getting into this habit because she may begin to require it every time she goes pee.
- ⊛ Stay with him while he sits on the potty. This encourages your child to stay on longer and makes it more fun.

- ✪ Provide an imaginary role model like Spider Man. Say that Spider Man pees and poops into the potty and so can you.
- ✪ Let her demonstrate how to use the potty to another child or using a stuffed animal. Teaching helps reinforce a child's own skills.
- ✪ Let your child do it his own way. If he wants to colour, play the guitar or play hand-held video games, just let him do it if it helps him to go.
- ✪ Kids have ears so avoid talking about her progress to other people or asking about any accidents in front of her when you pick her up from the babysitter's. Kids are smart and will pick up on your pressure and anxiety.
- ✪ Make sure you communicate your toilet training methods clearly to any of your child's other caregivers. Everyone has to be on board with the same methods for it to work. You may want to write down clear instructions for the caregiver and let them know that you really appreciate her input and cooperation. If the caregiver still seems to be ignoring your methods and going on with her own, let her know that although her method seems like a really great one, you know that for your child to succeed he has to stick to one plan, and you would appreciate it you were both on the same page.

## REAL LIFE

Now that you might be feeling overwhelmed with toilet training advice, perhaps you're thinking to yourself, "Yeah right! How on earth can I possibly do all that with my schedule?" Modern life usually means modern schedules for both you and your child, and there probably doesn't seem to be any way to devote so much of your day just to toilet training. Parents have jobs that keep them away for most of the day and children have multiple caregivers. Sometimes your other children may demand equal or more attention from you at the same time. Single parenting, while becoming more common, is not becoming any easier, and that often makes it more difficult for the children and the parents to deal with this kind of task. Sometimes daycares, preschools, or schools make demands that children are toilet trained and now you have a looming toilet training deadline that seems impossible to meet. What if your life is just hectic at the time, or you happen to be traveling? For most people, real life is a lot more complicated than toilet training manuals seem to appreciate. Don't worry if you can't devote six solid months of your attention for all of your child's waking hours. Nobody expects that from you.

Most manuals, including this manual summary, intend to provide the ideal situation. It can't be emphasized enough that it is up to you to pick and choose the method(s) that will work best for your child's personality and schedule.

You might need to recognize that toilet-training may require a bit more of your attention for a while, particularly if your child is a reluctant toilet learner. You may want to make a bit more room for it in your life. This is one of those jobs that's not worth doing unless you're going to do it right. So set a little bit of extra time and attention aside for your child and this task. Maybe wake up a bit earlier in the mornings so that the morning toilet sits feel relaxed and unrushed. Take the time to explain to the other caregivers about your toileting plan and make sure they're all on board. Watch your child's progress carefully when you can and make sure that you still give them the positive attention and praise that they deserve, even if you're exhausted. It will save you time in the end. Read on for

more advice about specific situations of modern day life and how to get around the obstacles.

### *Time saving tips*

- 🕒 Enlist the help of other family members or friends.
- 🕒 Make mealtimes easier with simple recipes.
- 🕒 Reduce the number of errands you need to run during the day – get as many of your errands done as possible after your children are asleep or while they are at school, daycare, or play group.
- 🕒 Let go of other daytime tasks for the next few months like entertaining friends, talking on the phone, and watching TV.

### Multiple caregivers

You may find that your child soils himself at daycare or school because he is accustomed to going after meals at home, but he isn't reminded to at school or they have a different toileting schedule. Perhaps your child has accidents when he becomes completely involved in story time at school. It is important to talk to the caregivers or teachers at school and ask them to help you by reminding your child to go after lunch or before story time. You can also try to change your home schedule to something more similar to the one at school. Talk to all the adults and care-givers in your child's life and make sure everyone is on board with your child's toileting schedule and needs. The same applies if you are separated or divorced and your child has two homes.

### Different homes

Sometimes it isn't always possible to come to a compromise with your ex-partner about methods of raising your child:

*“My ex-husband, Mark, and I separated shortly after Jenny's birth and so she spent her time between two homes with two different styles of parenting. It was difficult for Mark and I to communicate effectively, and to compromise about anything at all. When it came to toilet training I wanted to make sure that we were both on board with training her the same way so that she wouldn't get confused about what was expected of her. But Mark wasn't very cooperative. He was a lot looser with prompting her to get on the potty after every meal and before she went to bed. He also kept her potty in the bathroom instead of in her room like she was used to at my home. I kept it there so she could go if she woke up at night because she was afraid of walking to the bathroom alone. Any gains Jenny made when she was at home with me seemed to fly out the window when she was with her dad. She began to have accidents all the time. I just couldn't seem to*

*compromise with Mark so I finally decided to talk to Jenny about it instead. She had just turned 4 around this time and when I explained to her about two houses with two different rules and two different potties, it was like I turned on a switch. She had so many things to say and so many questions about her two houses. It was a really good conversation to have with her and after that she just seemed to accept her two houses with two rules. Things went a lot smoother with her toilet training from then on."*

## Travel

Any kind of travel can be a break in your child's routine that takes him away from familiar situations, causing anxiety that can result in accidents or constipation. To avoid any complications, you can make sure that you take your child to the bathroom frequently. You may also want to bring along your child's potty from home and some toys to make any toilet seem more familiar.

## Toilet training the older child

It is becoming more and more common for children to be toilet trained at a later age. Some parents just prefer to wait until their child shows all the signs of readiness and accept that this might be later than society might expect. Some parents may have already tried toilet training several times at a younger age but continually met with resistance. Some children may already have been trained but then regressed when they experienced a big stress in their daily lives. Perhaps your child has met with some developmental delays making it more difficult to toilet train.

There are benefits to training an older child such as an increased ability to visualize a goal and achieve it, better communication skills to express any anxiety or fear, and greater social awareness of peers. However, older children are more independent and may try to assert their independence by being more resistant. There is also the sheer force of habit. They may simply be very used to wearing a diaper and find it much easier than using a toilet.

Training an older child may require stepping back a bit and allowing him to do things on his own. Children between the ages of 3-5 are generally "do-it-myselfers." While you can physically place a young toddler on a potty, your older child will likely resist. Instead, you can try gentle reminders like, "Lunch time is over, now what time is it?" And your child can answer with "potty time!" and use that cue to go to the toilet.

Older children may tend to be in the "no!" stage where they seem to oppose whatever you say at first just to assert their own independence. The more you scream "yes!" the more they scream "no!" So one of the best ways to deal with this normal stage of childhood is to ease up any pressure you may be putting on your child. The more she realizes that the power to use the potty is her own responsibility, the less she will resist it. At first, your child may seem to take a few steps back in terms of the skills that she already may have acquired, but other motivators will soon kick in, like comparing herself to their toilet trained peers.

As children become more imaginative at this stage, they will often develop very creative fears or anxieties such as monsters living in the toilet. You may want to deal with this by reassuring your child that a monster couldn't possibly fit in the toilet and then demonstrate using your own creative methods (see above). You can accompany your child to the toilet and try to make her visits as anxiety free as possible until she gets over her fear. Occasionally the fears become so severe that you might need professional help. Discuss it with your physician.

Don't pressure your child too much, but you can gently encourage her by pointing out her peers or older siblings that are toilet trained. You can say, "Billy uses the potty, would you like to use the potty too?" Or reminding her that, "soon you'll be a big girl and you'll use the potty all alone." You can also take her to the store and look at big kid underpants to encourage her to want to toilet train.

### *Preschool/Kindergarten*

Sometimes preschools or schools will demand that your child be toilet trained before being accepted into their program. While you can try to speed up your child's toilet training schedule to try to make sure he is trained by a certain date, you may also want to ask the school if you can see how it goes for your child in this new setting surrounded by peers. You may say, "I think my child will do quite well once he is surrounded by his toilet trained peers and use the toilet properly in no time." You may also want to ask if your child can attend school in disposable training pants. What is most important to remember is that you can't force your child to be toilet trained by a certain time, and if it just doesn't seem to be happening, then you may just have to accept it and choose a school that is more understanding with its rules.

#### ***Peer pressure***

*One of the greatest motivators in slightly older kids is what their peers are doing. Seeing their friends using the potty at their house or at school is a great way to spark your child's interest in doing exactly the same. Preschoolers are most likely to imitate those they most like or admire.*

*Young children can also be quite cruel to their peers if they are different from them. If a child is still in diapers or soils and wets herself, then she can be subjected to a lot of teasing from her peers. Make sure you take this opportunity to reassure her that all kids can have accidents while they are learning to use the potty. It's also a good idea to talk to the adult in charge and try to curb any teasing or negative behavior in the future. This can be a difficult experience for your child but you can also use it as a potential motivator for your child to take the next step. Ask her if she would like to try out big kid underwear at home for the weekend and see how it feels like.*

*Be careful not to mix up your own feelings of wanting to protect your child from any teasing, and the feelings your child might actually be experiencing. You may be tempted to hide her away from kids her age who might tease her until she is all better. Rather than keeping her from fun social activities that are important to her development, you might just prepare the adult in charge in advance and pack her an extra change of clothes and wipes. You can sit down to talk with your child about avoiding such accidents before she goes. For example, making sure she remembers to listen to her body if it's telling her she has to go, or to make sure she isn't afraid to ask the adult in charge to go to the toilet if she needs to. By sending her out there with the tools she needs to succeed, and with the confidence that mommy or daddy thinks she can do it, her confidence will build and she will be one step closer to achieving her goal. Practice makes perfect, right?*

### *The Pros and Cons of Toilet Training a child just starting school*

#### **Pros**

- ☺ *Staff can recognize readiness and participate in the toilet training process.*
- ☺ *It provides an environment where interaction with toilet trained peers can boost interest and the desire to imitate.*

#### **Cons**

- ☹ *Inadequate supervision or if understaffed.*
- ☹ *Different toilet training methods. (Parents and staff must communicate and develop a consistent plan).*
- ☹ *Potty chairs and non-disposable training pants are not always practical in these settings.*

## TOILET TRAINING PROBLEMS

Now that you've read the pamphlet and put together the concepts and applied them to your child, things still may not be progressing. There could be many reasons for this.

### **Here are the most common reasons for toilet training problems:**

- 👤 **Readiness - child.** The child is not ready in terms of physical, emotional, social or behavioral skills.
- 👤 **Readiness – parent.** The parent is not ready (lacks time, patience, or desire to carry out a plan).
- 👤 **Communication.** The child doesn't quite understand what they are supposed to do.
- 👤 **Distraction.** The child has become too distracted with something else to care about going to the potty.
- 👤 **Boredom.** The child is bored with training.
- 👤 **Fear.** The child is fearful or uncomfortable with some aspect of training.
- 👤 **Power struggle.** There is a power struggle between the child and the parent.
- 👤 **Stress and pressure.** There's too much stress and pressure surrounding the process.
- 👤 **Unachievable expectations.** The parent has unrealistic expectations.
- 👤 **No plan.** The parent is not following a toilet training plan or jumps between plans.
- 👤 **Mixed messages.** The parent and other caregivers don't agree on a plan and are sending mixed messages.
- 👤 **Failure to accept accidents.** The parent is confusing normal accidents with failure.
- 👤 **Wrong schedule for the child.** The toilet sitting routine doesn't match the child's toilet pattern.
- 👤 **Wrong plan for parent.** The approach used doesn't suit the parent's personality or teaching style.

 **Wrong plan for child.** The approach used doesn't suit the child's learning style or personality.

 **Medical problem.** There is a medical problem like constipation, an infection, or allergies.



## REGRESSION

Regression can happen even long after your child has been toilet trained. Suddenly, after months of dryness, you may find your child soiling himself at preschool, hiding in the corner to have a bowel movement, or hiding his soiled underwear in the closet. Regression shouldn't normally last for more than a few weeks. If it lasts for longer than a month, it is possible your child wasn't completely toilet trained yet.

One view that can put things in perspective is to understand that toilet training is not simply a skill that kids learn in a month or so and then are perfect at, but something that they get better at over time. So accidents will happen and it's completely normal.

Children can also regress when there is a change in their routine. They may have been doing quite well and toileting fairly independently until they met with some sort of stress in their life like a new baby or a new daycare. They may suddenly start soiling or wetting themselves. This is just their way of reacting to the stress in their environment and the best way to deal with it is the following:

- **Identify the source of stress.** It is hard for your child to verbalize what is wrong so she is showing you by stopping toilet training, but *you* can certainly talk to her about it. Tell her you have been noticing she has been having more accidents lately and ask if it might be because she has a new baby sister who needs so much attention, or if it's because you moved to a new home and now her potty is in a new place.
- **Sympathize.** Let her know that it's normal to feel upset and you know that it has been hard for her.
- **Do what you can to fix the problem.** Arrange for special times to spend with her all alone or talk to her new caregivers about her toileting. Ask your child to participate in the problem solving as well.
- **Be clear about your expectations.** Make sure you let her know that you expect her to continue her toilet training efforts and that you know that she will get over this temporary hurdle. Continue to be accepting and supportive. Offer gently for her to go back to training pants for a while if she needs it but don't force them on her.

### Q&A

**My daughter graduated to the big kid underwear stage but now wants to go back to using diapers. What do I do?** *Try to make a big ceremony of the graduation and make it very clear that your child actually has graduated to big-kid status now. Make a special event out of it, bring her somewhere special, give her a special crown, make her feel like she's progressed to a new stage and that it's a lot more exciting and has a lot more benefits than being a little kid.*

## *RELUCTANCE AND RESISTANCE*

Reluctance to toilet train can develop into a little bit more than just difficulty. Your child can completely refuse to use the potty at all, which is called resistance or stool toileting refusal. You may even notice that in order to enforce his refusal, he holds back his bowel movements just to avoid having to use the potty, and this can lead to even more problems, like constipation and even soiling.

The resistant child may have achieved bladder control and has regular bowel movements in his pants or diapers that he can control but refuses to use the toilet for them. Some kids may ask the parent for a diaper and then poop immediately into diaper in a standing position but will hold back the bowel movement if the diaper is refused (The child is so-called “diaper trained”). You might find it surprising to know that more than 1 in 5 children experience at least one month of stool toileting refusal, but only about 1 in 5 of these children keep on refusing after 6 months.

Because kids with stool toileting refusal toilet train later than their peers and are at risk for constipation and soiling, a prompt response is very important. The immediate treatment for stool toileting refusal is to put your child back into diapers or pull-ups. However, you will have to figure out the reasons behind your child’s toileting refusal and find a unique solution to tackle them. Some of the most common reasons for resistance and possible solutions are discussed below.

### Reasons for resistance

- Confusion about toilet training and about what is expected.
- Fear about using the toilet – (monsters, being sucked away, etc)
- Difficult temperament, or independence or control issues.
- Too much pressure to perform.
- The wrong toilet training technique for the parent or child.
- Hard, painful stools from constipation.
- Other medical reasons like urinary tract infections or allergies.
- A change in routine like a new sibling or new home.
- Dependence on pull-ups.
- Clothes that are hard to get off, or a potty that is hard to get to.
- Gets too involved with playing.
- The parents are too busy.
- Excessive family conflict
- Possibly: training at too early an age,

## Tips

- ✪ After your resistant child has a bowel movement in the corner of a room, on the floor or in her pull-ups, take the mess to the toilet and say “poop belongs in the toilet. I know you’ll do it right next time”
- ✪ If your child asks for a diaper to soil in, allow it at first but gear future steps to pooping in the toilet. So allow the diaper but ask him to stand in the bathroom to go for about one week and then coax him to sit on the toilet in his diaper for a while. You can even cut a hole in the bottom of his diaper before you get to the completely diaper-free stage. Remember to give plenty of rewards for achievements.

### ***Child’s temperament? Parents’ temperament? Or situation?***

*In one study, difficult toilet trainers did not have more behavioral problems but were more likely to be less adaptable to situations, more negative in mood, less persistent when it came to achieving goals, and had more of a tendency to withdraw from new situations. They were also more likely to be constipated, though children who weren’t difficult toilet trainers were also often found to suffer from constipation. Difficult toilet trainers were also more likely to hide to have a bowel movement, ask for pull-ups or diapers to have bowel movements, hide dirty underwear, and to have been teased because of soiling accidents. Hiding to have a bowel movement shows that these children have bowel control AND have a social awareness of the privateness of the act. Asking for pull-ups suggests control, but the soiled underwear and teasing shows that somehow these children have trouble putting all of these things together. Perhaps they feel overwhelmed, ashamed, and unable to meet the full demands of using the toilet. They regress to an earlier period of security. Parental expectations and reactions, combined with peer humiliation may cause the child to feel even more overwhelmed.*

*In the same study, parenting styles did not differ greatly between the parents of difficult toilet trainers and the comparison group but they trended toward more dysfunctional styles. There was no significant difference in the amount of anxiety-provoking events associated with toileting in the lives of the difficult toilet trainers, like a public accident, parental separation or divorce, a new sibling’s birth or interruption of toilet training. However, this group did tend to have more fears of toilet training than the easy group.*

*The point? Difficult toilet training had some association with certain difficult temperamental traits, a tendency to dysfunctional parenting styles and constipation. Aside from these tendencies, there is no one reason that children may be more reluctant toilet trainers. So trying to place blame isn’t productive. Instead, try to determine what might be keeping your child from toilet training, such as constipation or an issue with independence, and read the tips in this pamphlet for those specific issues.*

## Figuring out the reason for resistance

Now that you know some of the common reasons for resistance, try to figure out why your child is resistant by observing her toilet behavior and even by talking to her about it. Look for clues like hiding to go to the washroom, demanding to close the door, or embarrassment at talking about having to go. Does she have accidents because she is so wrapped up in what she's doing? Does she have accidents minutes after leaping off the toilet because she is too active or impatient to stay seated for long? You can't address your child's problem until you figure out what is causing it.

## Power struggles

Try to avoid conflict with your child and don't enter into long debates about toilet training. Avoiding conflict is not so easy, especially since the toilet training time is usually a period in your child's development when they are experimenting with independence and resistance therefore trying to get them to do something like toilet training, is just conflict waiting to happen. However, if you try to get inside your child's brain for a second, it may help you to avoid conflict at all costs while you are training. Let's say that one day your child absolutely refuses to sit on the toilet at all and throws a temper tantrum if you even suggest it. You may want to reason with your child about why he should use the potty or toilet, but it isn't reason that will convince him. If you react by arguing with your child or trying to force him to do it, he will only resist more. It will be a negative interaction, but your child will still be winning some sort of attention from you, and that may lead him to keep seeking it out in the same argumentative manner. The more you get into it with him, the more he keeps seeking out your attention in this negative way. So, as backwards as it may seem, the best way to deal with a temper tantrum is to accept it and not give it any attention. However, don't abandon your child or send them to their room during tantrums. Stay close at hand until the tantrum is over. Then you can tell him in an understanding way, "I know that sitting on the toilet can be hard, but I know you can do it. When you're done being angry, then you'll need to sit on the toilet." If you show your reluctant child that temper tantrums don't faze you, they will be less likely to try them in the future. It may be the harder thing to do at the moment, but in the end it may make things easier for you.

Give your resistant child control. This sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, but you can give a certain amount of control and avoid temper tantrums by agreeing with your child about certain issues. The key is that when your child sees that their refusing has no effect, or if he feels he has control, then he will be much more cooperative. You can surprise him by agreeing and saying, "Ok, you don't want to use the toilet today, but I know that when you want a sticker for your sticker chart, you'll try again." Or "Ok. You're not ready today, but maybe you'll be ready tomorrow." So try to remember not only to give them positive attention, but also to stay away from giving them negative attention. No matter how difficult they are being.

If your child is generally resistant with all tasks asked of him, like getting dressed, bath time or bedtime, then try to tackle these issues before you even attempt toilet training. You probably won't have much luck convincing your child to sit on a potty at scheduled times if they are refusing to do everything else.

## The resistant child who says “no” to absolutely everything.

Even if these children show all the signs of readiness for toilet training, they will scream “no” if you even mention the word “potty.” One suggestion to deal with this is to provide them with fewer opportunities to say no. One clever parent bought her child a potty when she thought he was ready and just placed it in the bathroom and resisted the temptation to ask if her child wanted to use it. Her child’s natural curiosity led him to inquire about it and eventually try it out on his own while avoiding any screaming matches.

Try to give him a choice instead of asking if he wants to do something. For example, don’t ask “Do you want to try sitting on the potty before bath time?” Instead ask “Would you like to sit on the potty before or after bath time?” You’re not giving in and letting your child run your life; you’re minimizing conflict and achieving your mutual goal by giving him an acceptable amount of control. See the “Tips” box for more examples of choices.

## Independence issues and backing off

Sometimes children who resist toilet training are asserting their own independence and resisting control. Eating and toileting are some of the few functions that a child completely controls, and if she feels that someone is trying to control her, she can control her situation by withholding stool or rarely by soiling or wetting herself.

The toilet training manuals all seem to agree that if the independent child feels like she is being controlled and is reacting by resisting toilet training - back off and put the responsibility in your child’s hands. It’s time to hand over the control of toilet training and have the “I’m backing-off talk.” Tell your child clearly and non-judgmentally, “I think you can learn to use the potty all by yourself. I have faith in you, so I’m going to back off and give you the space to learn. You’ll do better that way. You know where the potty chair is, and you know how it feels when you need to pee or poop.”

Parents can become concerned about taking a step backwards like this. However, continuing to push a child to toilet train when they are absolutely refusing will just meet with more resistance. Studies show that about 90% of kids who were put back into diapers or pull-ups when they were resistant began to use the toilet or potty for bowel movements on their own within three months.

## More tips for the extremely independent child

- **Make it their idea.** If your child is very much attached to independence and being able to control his life, the more things seem like they are their idea, the better. Let your child help in creating his own toilet training plan. He will really take pride and ownership in the tasks he accomplishes.
- **Don't make an issue of it.** Your child is more likely to respond positively to the idea of toilet training if you mention it in passing as a new idea she might like to try. You can point out how other peers might be using a potty and you can ask her if she is interested in trying it too.
- **Give your child choices.** Instead of letting toilet training become the issue, you can distract your child by giving him choices of how to toilet train. He will likely feel more in control and avoid questioning the concept of toilet training altogether. Examples of choices are underwear or pull-ups, toilet seat up or down, which book (give specific choices), which song, sit for 4 or 5 minutes, which sticker?
- **Let your child do the rewarding.** You can let your child apply the stickers on her reward chart on her own, or choose her own treats from a grab-bag.
- **Promote self-awareness.** Encourage your child to notice on his own when he has to go to the toilet, while you silently keep watch as well.
- **Offer your assistance.** Ask him if he wants you to lead him to the toilet, verbally remind him, or give him a signal like clapping your hands or ringing a bell at the right times.
- **Avoid confrontations.** If your child absolutely refuses to go to the toilet, don't argue, just let her experiment with her defiance. She will learn that it is less pleasant for her to have dirty or soiled underpants, and no reward for the day than it is to just go when she needs to.
- **Praise and admire.** As for all children, your child will respond positively to praise.
- **Let him learn from experience.**
- **Take a break.** If your child is absolutely against toilet training and it is becoming a huge source of stress in your household, you can make the decision to step back and return to it when things have calmed down. Try not to criticize your child for what has happened.

## Personality type

Different children have different personalities, and toilet training is definitely not a “one size fits all” type of endeavor. Try to adjust to what works best for your child’s personality. A private child may benefit by having a secret hand signal to indicate he needs to go instead of having to announce it loudly. An active child that gets lost in their play may benefit by having scheduled toilet sitting times at predictable times of day. The child afraid to use the washroom outside the home may benefit from being shown the toilet in a new environment before she is left alone there. You can let her practice asking another grown-up to use the washroom if she is at day-care, at school, or at a friend or a relative’s house.

## Your personality

Are you the type of person that loses your temper easily? Toilet training can be a bumpy road with a lot of setbacks and accidents along the way. It is a normal part of the training process. If you get angry every time your child has an accident, toilet training may become a big source of stress in your child’s life and in your relationship. Your child may refuse to take part in such an unpleasant activity entirely and put the breaks on toilet training altogether. Plan ahead as to how you might deal with your disappointment or frustration and how to show your child acceptance of mistakes or struggles. Plan to step out of the room for a moment and count to 10 before you speak, or make a joke out of the situation. Allow the other parent or caregiver to take over if your style just doesn’t seem to be working and if the other parent tends to be better with handling anger and accepting your child’s independence.

## Change in the routine

Children can become resistant when there is a change in the routine. Things like a new baby, a new schedule when a parent gets a new job, a new caregiver or having guests stay for a while can cause him to stop toilet training efforts due to the anxiety, fear or stress around the new situation. Quite often the resistance is a reaction of your child to a change in the attention he would normally get from you, and the resistance is a way to get that attention back. You can anticipate difficulty in toilet training if you know a change is coming by explaining the new arrangement and doing things like showing him pictures of the guests or the caregiver ahead of time so he can get used to them. It is also good to make your time extra special with him by playing his favorite game and making sure he knows that he is still a priority in your life despite the change in schedule.

## Reactions to emotional situations

Emotional situations can cause your child to behave in certain ways, like a desire for more attention even if it is in a negative way. Perhaps your child feels overly controlled by you in terms of bathroom use because she has been asked too frequently about going to the toilet, so now she holds back until she has an accident. Fear of things like monsters in the toilet or the loudness of the flush can cause your child to avoid the toilet

and have more accidents. Finally, a lot of children have a stage where they want to return to the comfort of being pampered like a baby and may ask to be put back into diapers.

### **The wrong motivation?**

Using the words “big boy” or “big girl” can either be encouraging or stressful for your child. Some kids are motivated at times by wanting to imitate you or an older sibling or friend, and sometimes they may feel like regressing back to a younger stage, especially if there’s a new baby in the home getting a lot of attention. However, you want to be clear that as your child gets older, you will expect them to take charge of certain tasks like eating, dressing, and using the toilet. Make sure your child knows it is up to them, but that everyone learns to use the toilet.

Avoid using “If you go to the potty it will make Mommy so happy” as a motivator. Children are smart and will know you’re trying to get them to do something they don’t want to do. Also avoid going to the other extreme and yelling at them that they have to go because you said so. Try to give them a clear, direct message with no guilt or pressure like, “one day when you feel the pee is ready to come out, you’ll walk to the bathroom, pull down your pants and go in the toilet.” Focus on toilet training not as something that “Mommy wants me to do” but as something that everybody does.

### **The right motivation**

Promise fun times ahead. Tempt your child with all the fun activities and privileges that the older children get to enjoy because they’re potty trained. Emphasize how good it feels to be clean and dry whenever you see a chance. And remember to always praise good choices.

### **Stay positive**

Keep a positive attitude. Talk about successes often in front of your child, but avoid talking about problems or setbacks, even if you think your child is out of ear-shot. Children are smart and they will easily pick up on stress you may be feeling about their toilet training and this will set them back further.

### **Not ready yet**

Resistance can also be a sign of your child not being ready yet. Try to avoid backtracking by putting her back in diapers and stopping completely, instead try to slow down and make things easier for your child and make sure that she relearns positive behaviors by ensuring the potty is easily accessible, that she gets sufficient praise for her efforts, and making clothing easy to remove. If your child won’t tolerate toilet training at all, then give her a break for a few months until it is a better time.

### *Things parents would do in retrospect*

- Identify emotional triggers and back off when they experience them.
- Wait until they were alone with their partner before arguing with them about parenting styles. Studies show that conflict between parents over rules is more disruptive than having inconsistent rules.
- Worry less about mess and focus more on the child's self-esteem.
- Try to maintain a sense of humor and remember that it will pass.

### **Tips**

- ✧ Waiting to toilet train your child after 3½ may make it harder because she has become accustomed to diapers or pull-ups
- ✧ Talk to all of your child's other caregivers for their ideas. They may have a different perspective on your child than you do and their input might be very useful.
- ✧ Test the water to see where your child is at. You can say "You didn't want to try the potty yesterday so I guess we should put pull-ups on you today." You may be surprised to have your child refuse the pull-ups and opt for the potty.
- ✧ Point your child in the right direction. Some parents have reported success by simply putting a gentle hand on their reluctant child's shoulder and leading him in the direction of the bathroom. However, it is important that you never use any force to convince your child to do something he doesn't want to.
- ✧ Don't punish or nag your child to convince him to toilet train. Discontinue training for a few weeks or months. In the meantime, continue to discuss toilet training with your child and normalize toileting by inviting him into the washroom if you or any toilet trained siblings are using it. You can use books or videos on toilet training to help.
- ✧ If your child begins to link toilet training with just one parent and refuses to go with anyone else, at this point it's good to let your child know that using the toilet is his responsibility and let him have a go at toileting independently. You can walk him to the door of the washroom and encourage him to try on his own.
- ✧ Negotiate a potty plan with your child. For instance, you may tell her you use the washroom after mealtimes, after you wakeup and before you go to bed. Once she's agreed, this becomes another daily chore on her list that needs to be done. You may have to help a little bit with reminders or accompany her if she is very hesitant. Don't be afraid to refuse a treat until she meets her responsibility as she agreed.
- ✧ You can provide your child with helpful tips along the way like, "you look like you're squirming a lot. Does your stomach feel funny? That means you have to go to the potty." Or "I know it's fun to play and you don't want to stop, but if you feel you have to go to the potty, it's important to go right away." Or "If you need to use the potty at Suzy's house, just tell her mommy and she'll take you right away."
- ✧ Try to help her recognize how good it feels to use the potty and to be clean and dry.
- ✧ Make sure all caregivers know that scolding or punishment is not acceptable.

## *Difficult behavior vs. behavioral disorder*

Discuss your child's behavioral issues with your doctor. It may be that your child has a behavioral disorder outside the regular tricky toddler temper tantrums. If that is the case, your child may benefit from medical attention. At the very least, your doctor may be able to direct you towards a child psychologist or counselor that has a lot of experience dealing with more difficult temperaments.

Signs that a temper tantrum is more than a typical stage:

- Occurs frequently - several times per day.
- Dangerous to the child – they become bruised, bleed, or put themselves in harm's way.
- Dangerous to others – you or your other children become bruised, bleed or have broken bones.
- The child is hysterical, doesn't calm within a few minutes or seems out of control and wild.
- The child is aggressive and purposely hurtful to others and wanting to cause harm beyond just the harm caused by thrashing and needing to be controlled.

Issues with children with behavioral disorders:

- Behavioral disorders include oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS).
- These kids might not be as strongly motivated or as able to respond to the social reinforcements that work with other children.
- Many can find it hard to deal with any change in routine.
- Some kids with behavioral disorders don't naturally imitate their parents' or their peers' behavior.
- Others learn only by simple imitation or other concrete, nonverbal demonstrations like using a doll to act out the steps of toileting.
- Once you decide your child is ready for toilet training, first start with observing his toileting patterns, fears, challenges, and the methods that he learns best by. For example, firm but gently physical demonstrations like being placed on the potty at regular times, a formal routine with a series of simple and predictable steps (verbally explained over and over, illustrated with pictures, or listed on a chart), or offhand comments that avoid resistance.
- You may want to start rewards for even just entering washroom at first. Smaller, tangible rewards tend to work best.

## **Q&A**

**My child refuses to go to the toilet before we leave the house. How can I get her to go?** *If your child normally uses a potty or toilet, then chances are that she is uncomfortable with the mess of soiled or wet pants. To avoid a power struggle and further resistance, allow her to learn from her mistakes. Just be prepared for accidents and bring along a change of clothes and some wipes to clean up. Your child will learn better by experiencing that it isn't fun to have dirty pants instead of from you forcing her to go.*

**My son Matt yells "No!" whenever I ask if he wants to go to the toilet and then he has an accident on the floor. What can I do?** *Your child is showing his independence even if it means going to the toilet on his own terms wherever he wants. The more attention you give to this kind of behavior, the more he will repeat it. It is a good idea to just downplay the incident, clean up calmly and wait until he is in a more mature phase of independence.*

**Brendon jumps off the toilet seat before he is done and leaves a mess on the floor. What do I do?** *Although you can delay training to a time you think he'll be more able to sit calmly for longer periods of time, he is still showing signs of interest in toilet learning by wanting to sit on the toilet at all. You may find it easier to just find some ways to encourage your child to sit on the potty for longer like sitting and talking to him, giving him toys or books to play with, and providing him with praise or rewards for sitting. Don't force your child to sit if he absolutely refuses, and don't make him sit for more than 5 minutes at a time. He will start associating the process with negative emotions and you will be losing ground that you've gained.*

**Shannon just can't seem to get it right. She runs to me yelling "I did it!" But when I go to the washroom there is a mess beside the toilet as well as in the toilet.** *This can be frustrating but try not to get angry. Praise your child by saying "You almost did it! You tried to pee in the potty but you stood up too fast. Next time you can just stay on a little bit longer." Then you can clean up the mess together.*

# CONSTIPATION AND HOLDING BACK

## CONSTIPATION

Constipation is a very common occurrence in young children, particularly in the toilet training years. It can be extremely disruptive not only to toilet training, but to daily life. Children can experience a lot of pain either when passing a large, hard stool or even just having such a large mass of stool in their tummies. When passing the stool, the constipated child can get anal fissures (small tears in the anus) that can make it even more painful. Experiencing pain while having a bowel movement may cause the child to hold back bowel movements in the future, leading to chronic constipation and toileting reluctance. Soiling is another possible outcome of constipation and can cause a lot of embarrassment for children and inability to participate in regular daily activities. Other complications include a loss of appetite or weight loss because children don't feel like eating when they are all blocked up. Constipation is also often a cause of bladder accidents, frequent urination and even urinary tract infections.

It is therefore very important that parents look out for signs of constipation and to treat constipation as early as possible before it progresses to any of the complications, or results in a toileting behavior change that will make toilet training an extremely difficult task.

### Definition

Constipation is not really about how frequently the child has a bowel movement, because what is normal for one child may seem constipated for another. However, the normal range is considered to be somewhere between 3 times a day to once every 3 days, with an average of about once a day. A child is considered constipated if he has a bowel movement less than once every three days, lasting for more than 2 weeks. More importantly, a child is considered constipated if he has large, hard bowel movements that are difficult and painful to pass. Dr. Howard likes to consider constipation as having bowel movements that the patient or parents find to infrequent or too hard.

## *Signs and Symptoms of constipation*

Although constipation is very common in young children, less than half of parents recognize that their children are constipated, so make sure you look for the signs.

### **What to look for:**

- A bowel movement less than once every 3 days
- An extremely large stool
- A very hard stool
- Small amounts of pellet-like stools
- A distended, full-appearing belly
- Unwillingness to use the potty or toilet
- An abnormal loss of appetite
- Stomach aches
- Straining really hard while trying to make a bowel movement
- Occasional bleeding from the anus. This is due to hard stool damaging the anus as it passes through causing anal fissures.
- Unusual body language like clinging, hiding or freezing
- Constant smudging of stool in the diaper or underwear.
- Frequent urination and bladder accidents.

## *Causes of constipation*

The most common cause of childhood constipation is from holding back painful large stools. Most parents worry that some bad disease is the cause of constipation, but beyond the newborn period, it is extremely unlikely. It may be linked to a diet low in fiber, fresh fruits and vegetables and liquids or high in constipating foods. Usually what happens is that the child may get constipated once and has a large, hard, and painful bowel movement that may even result in a tear around the anus (anal fissure). The child then begins to associate bowel movements with pain and simply decides to avoid that pain at all costs. So in the child's brain, the solution is to never poop again and she begins to hold back her bowel movements by clenching her muscles. Eventually the rectum gets stretched out, the stools get bigger and more painful and the feeling of having to go slowly fades away, and the rectum is no longer as good at pushing out poop. If things get really bad, soiling can even occur and this is discussed in detail in next section. With time, this type of retentive behavior becomes automatic instead of voluntary. Toileting anxiety may even result in the child having problems with relaxing the pelvic muscles that she needs to relax to let stool or urine pass, making her job even more difficult.

Basically, anything that causes your child to experience a painful poop can lead to this cycle of holding back and even more constipation.

Here are some common causes of painful poops:

- 👉 **Toilet training.** The whole idea of toilet training is asking the child to hold back their stool until he can make it to a potty, so it is a very common period for children to become constipated.
- 👉 **Transition from breast milk or formula to solids.** Milk and Formula have both calories and water. Solids have calories but less water. Parents can not differentiate thirst from hunger in their babies. If the child is thirsty and it is quenched with solids, then the child might become a little dehydrated which results in increased absorption of water from the stools, creating a hard possibly painful stool.
- 👉 **Changes in the diet.** Low fiber diets with very little fluid intake will tend to cause constipation. Kids in the toilet training age are more susceptible to constipation due to a diet low in fiber and high in milk. Milk is a great food but has no fiber.
- 👉 **Stressful events.** Even for adults, stressful situations and travel can lead to constipation.
- 👉 **Unavailability of toilets.** If a child doesn't have access to a toilet, or is in a new environment like daycare where she is unfamiliar with the location of the toilets, is allowed to go only at certain times, or is simply afraid to ask, it will often be easier for her to just hold it in.
- 👉 **The child is too busy or distracted.** A child's priority list does not look like that of an adult. As adults we view fecal and urinary continence pretty high on our priority lists, but for kids it might be much below other more engaging things like running around the backyard, playing in the sandbox, watching their favorite cartoon, or beating the big boss in a video game. So they hold back until it's too late, especially kids who tend to be either daydreamers or extremely active.
- 👉 **Conflict with parents around toileting.**
- 👉 **Difficulty pushing.** Children using adult sized toilets and do not have a stool or adequate support for their feet may not have sufficient leverage to push their poop out.

## Does the child have a medical causes of constipation

It is extremely rare for constipation to be due to a medical cause in a child beyond the newborn stage, however, it is important for your doctor to rule this remote possibility out, especially if the constipation is chronic and doesn't seem to respond to treatment. Constipation due to a medical cause is more common in developmentally challenged children. However, in Dr. Howard's practice, when it comes to otherwise normal children, less than 1 percent of Dr. Howard's specialty practice in constipation has a medical cause to explain the constipation.

However, there are three features that might raise the alarm for the child to have something else causing the encopresis

1. No bladder control – the control of the urinary valves is basically done by the same nerves and muscles. If there is no bladder control then there might be something wrong with the nervous or muscular control. This child should see a physician
2. The child is worried about the soiling. In encopresis due to constipation, the child is usually quite happy to sit in their stool. However, if the child is truly

motivated to toilet train, then one has to look at the nervous and muscular control of the bowel. This child should see a physician

3. The child had obvious bowel problems since birth (day 1) Basically babies are born with all the equipment. The equipment doesn't disappear with life. Therefore is a bit is missing, the child will never have a normal bowel habit. This child should see a physician.

## Encopresis

Soiling (also known as *encopresis* in doctor lingo) is one of those topics that is taboo but that is surprisingly more common than people think. Parents tend not to want to discuss how their child poops his pants with their friends and family. Parents may feel like it is embarrassing for them, their child and that they are probably the only ones out there with this problem, but it affects around 1-3% of children, and it is much more common in boys than in girls. Many parents are also surprised to find that soiling is usually caused by constipation and that it is treated by treating the constipation. So it's time to talk about soiling and to demystify it.

### **So, what is encopresis? The official definition of encopresis is the following:**

- The repeated passage of stool in inappropriate places (like the child's pants or the floor). It can be both intentional or unintentional.
- This happens at least once every 3 months.
- It is considered encopresis only in children over 4 years old.
- It is not due to medications or a medical cause except for constipation.

### **The vast majority of cases are due to constipation.**

Over 90% of cases of soiling have to do with constipation. This type of soiling is also known as retentive encopresis. These kids will soil small amounts of loose stool several times a day but occasionally have very large bowel movements. The stool has often been described as clay-like, but occasionally it is quite well formed if a piece of the larger stool mass that is causing the blockage breaks off. Some children are "intermittent soilers", which means that they stop soiling after a big bowel movement but start again after few days of withholding. They may also present with bladder control or frequency problems. This is due to the fact that in child the pelvis contains only the bladder and the rectum. If the rectum is distended it pushes on the bladder and the bladder cannot hold as much urine.

Soiling due to constipation starts when your child experiences one painful stool and does everything possible to hold his stools in order to avoid the pain. The stool accumulates and forms a mass that only becomes more hard and more painful leading to more constipation. Stool keeps building up in a mass inside the rectum, and the rectum begins to stretch, stretching the muscles and nerves around it as well. When the muscles become stretched out, they are no longer as good at squeezing stool out. When nerves are stretched out, your child will no longer able to feel the sensation of "having to go," adding even more to the cycle. The rectum finally stretches to the point that the internal anal sphincter can no longer do its job to hold in the stool and it relaxes. This lets semisolid stool sneak around the giant mass of stool in the rectum and out into your child's pants. There is also a bendy

bit at the end of the bowel which helps keep stool inside. When a child is constipated, the stool sitting in his bottom keeps this bendy bit straight so looser stool higher up can squeeze past into his pants. At this point, your child is so constipated, and his rectum and internal anal sphincter so stretched out, that he has absolutely no control over the stool that is just desperately trying to find a way out of the child's body. Until that large mass of stool is gotten rid of, and your child's rectum begins to return to its normal shape, more stool will continue to sneak around the mass and your child will keep soiling his pants.

Many parents find it hard to believe that soiling is usually due to constipation. Quite often, it is mistaken for diarrhea and the kids are given over the counter medications for diarrhea, only making things worse. Parents also frequently make the assumption that their child is soiling because he is trying to be spiteful or difficult. While there are sometimes psychological or behavioral causes to soiling, which we will discuss later, constipation is the cause of soiling in more than 90% of the cases.

## *TREATMENT FOR CONSTIPATION*

Please see our website area for constipation

### **Toilet Training the Constipated Child**

Constipation frequently causes fecal soiling and toilet training is extremely difficult if the child is full of hard stool. When there is constant seepage the child is unable to toilet train and the constipation must be treated in order to start toilet training. Psychological measures being used on a physical problem results in huge confusion in the child.

It is imperative that normal stooling is achieved before resuming toilet training. However, toilet training can be resumed as soon as normal stooling frequency and consistency is obtained, usually within a few days of initiating proper treatment. The child is physically able to toilet train once the large stool burden is removed from their colon. Toilet training can occur while the child is receiving medicines. If the child is in the tapering stage of medicines then there is a risk that toilet training can cause them to hold back and have a recurrence of the constipation.

It is better to toilet train the child while they are on a constant dose of medicine or when the medicine has been effectively withdrawn, NOT during the tapering phase.

The method of toilet training the constipated child is exactly the same as the non-constipated child. However, one should be aware that there is a lot of reluctance on the part of the child, since many previous attempts were unsuccessful due to the physical inability to control the stools.

The good news is that improvement can be expected in virtually all kids with the use of laxatives, diet and behavioral changes. However, complete recovery on the first attempt (more than three bowel movements a week without the help of laxatives) is less common. About one third of the children relapse and get constipated again.

## Tips

- ✧ Have your child help with dirty clothes but don't force him to clean them on his own as punishment. Cleaning up should be a matter of fact response to soiled underpants.
- ✧ Have her help dumping the poops in the toilet so that she is still in charge of disposing of her body products in the toilet, even if it is in this way
- ✧ Don't force him to walk around in dirty clothes as a punishment. Tell him to clean himself up as soon as possible.
- ✧ Don't expect her to apologize for her mistake. Remember, NO BLAME.
- ✧ Downplay any teasing he is getting from his peers at daycare or school. Let him know that they will soon stop because he will soon be able use the toilet for his poops.
- ✧ You can expect your alternate caregiver, daycare or school to be supportive of your child who soils. You can expect them to help her clean up and change her clothes when needed, keep her accidents confidential from the other kids, keep you informed of her progress, give her any medications she needs, keep her away from constipating foods and encourage her to drink lots of water.
- ✧ Since older children tend to use the washroom by themselves and parents may not be aware of bowel habits, try to ask regularly about your child's bowel movements. Make sure your child isn't holding back because they are embarrassed about using the toilet at school.
- ✧ You may want to discuss your child's toileting issues one on one with his teacher. There may be a private bathroom that your child can use so that he feels less embarrassed. You should make it clear to his teacher that your child be allowed to leave the classroom whenever he needs to go. To make constantly asking less of an issue for your child, you can set up a secret hand signal that he will use to indicate to the teacher that he has to go without drawing attention to himself. Leave a change of clothing at school for him until the soiling has been treated.

### **To prevent future bouts**

- ✧ Explain to your child how her body works and why holding in poop will get her constipated and leaky.
- ✧ Help ease his stress. Some kids get constipated because of stress, so when you suspect it is a difficult time for him, help relax him.
- ✧ Set aside special times for your child to potty-sit in a calm, unstressed manner.
- ✧ Make sure your child gets exercise. Exercise helps get things moving in the digestive tract and helps your kid have regular bowel movments.

## PROBLEMS, WHEN TO GO TO THE DOCTOR

This manual is not to replace the advice of your child's doctor. If you see any of the signs below or just suspect that something is not right, don't hesitate to go.

- If you know that your child has "over the top" temper tantrums and behavioral issues.
- If your child has a history of trauma or abuse.
- If there is no progress in 6-8 weeks. After trying to toilet train for this amount of time, your child will not necessarily be toilet trained, but there should be at least some interest, improvement or successes.
- If your child has been constipated for at least two weeks.
- Constipation is recurring, and it comes on quickly despite a high fiber diet.
- If your child is soiling.
- If your child wets when she giggles or feels stress, can't hold in her pee when she really has to go, has a weak urine stream, has to go often, pees large volumes, has pain when she pees or has constantly damp underwear.
- If your child is in extreme distress. If something is really bothering your child, it's a good sign that it's important.
- There are signs of blood in the stool. If it is accompanied with a significant amount of blood on the toilet paper, it usually represents a fissure and is less concerning.
- The stool is black.

👉 Note: prepare your child for the doctor so that she knows it's not a punishment. You can say, "We're going to go visit Dr. Howard now because he sees a lot of kids who have trouble pooping and I bet he can help us too."