Toilet training

Toilet training is an important step in your child's growing independence. It is a skill you will want to introduce patiently at the right time. To check whether your child is ready for toilet training, ask the following questions.

DOES YOUR CHILD:

- Stay dry for 2 hours or more?
- Have bowel movements generally at the same time each day?
- Understand directions like "come here" or "where is your nose?"
- Move from one room to another without help?
- Sit in a chair and play quietly for up to five minutes at a time?
- Show periods of independence and pride in learning new skills?
- Copy adult behaviours?
- Feed himself?
- Have no viruses and urinary tract infections that may cause persistent wetting?
- Remain free from behaviour problems?
- Have no neurological damage that could prevent bladder or bowel control?
- Not taking medication that may have side effects on elimination?
- Show an awareness of having just urinated or had bowel movement by changing facial expression making different sound, crossing legs, quietness, irritability, squirming etc.

All the above skills are important – the most important prerequisite is the final one. Your child can't anticipate the need to urinate or defecate but somehow shows an awareness after having done so.

Much of the success or failure of your child's toilet training is dependent on your readiness to spend a significant amount of time and energy for 2 weeks to a month. Start training when social disruptions are at a minimum. Distractions like the birth of a new baby, or if your child is sick can disrupt the process. If social disruptions occur so toilet training is unmanageable, stop and try again when your schedule is less hectic.

Before you begin training, collect data on when your child is wet and dry. Keep a record every half-hour for 4 to 7 days during the child's wakeful hours. After pinpointing the times before your child is wet, you can plan when you sit your child on the toilet. Consistency is very important, and you can plan to take your child to the toilet when family disruptions are at a minimum.

If the potty has sides on and the child's feet can touch the floor he will feel more secure. If you use a toilet insert for training on the toilet, provide a stool or box that will support the child's feet. Introduce the potty or potty-chair to your child. Show him the toilet and the potty and talk about their uses. Set the potty up in the bathroom. Sooner or later he will sit on it. Let him get used to sitting on the potty with nappies on.

When the child shows awareness, you can begin bowel training. There are several reasons for beginning with bowel movements first – the child has more time to anticipate a bowel movement, calmly encourage him to sit on the potty. If the child resists wait and try again another time.

When the child is successful, praise him for being such a big boy. Don't react too strongly. Pay special attention to keeping your child dry and clean – when the child is kept dry wetness becomes something the child finds unpleasant and wants to avoid.

When you are bowel training the child may urinate in the potty. Gradually he will connect the feeling of a full bladder, urination and wet pants. It takes time to learn this connection. The child will not immediately be able to act on the feeling of needing to urinate and waiting to get to the potty.

Place the child on the potty regularly. Don't leave the child on the chair for longer than 5 – 10 minutes. After a few weeks of occasional successes, put your child in training pants with plastic cover. Be prepared for accidents and clean up without a fuss. Keep your reminders positive – your goal is to encourage the child to be aware of his need to urinate. Try timing your reminders when you think he may have a full bladder, or when it is time he often needs to go.

SOME REMINDERS

- Before you begin training, decide what words you will use for urinating and defecating. Use words you will be comfortable with at home and in public. You may consider using the sign for toilet (makaton).

- During toilet training do not flush the toilet until he has moved away from the toilet. The noise and the idea of being sucked away may frighten children. Some children enjoy flushing the toilet themselves.

- Dress child in loose fitting clothing. Use training pants and outer pants that he can pull up and down without help.

- Your child will first learn to be toilet trained during the day. Naptime and night time training comes later. Also, be prepared for temporary setbacks. A new baby, an illness, or moving may interfere with toilet training.

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