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FACT SHEET

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Toilet Training

For parents, embarking on a new stage of development of their child to include toilet training, it can be a mixture of rewards and frustration. The process can be short and sweet or a long ongoing battle between the parent and child.

There are no hard fixed rules for parents beginning toilet training, however there can be some consistent decisions made in how the parent approaches this new developmental task of their young child. The following information including cues and strategies are just a guide to help parents in successfully assisting their child to become independent in toileting. It needs to be remembered that each child is different and develops understanding of their own bodies, instructions and skills at different rates. Toilet training can be an emotional time for parents. Parents often have feelings of guilt and shame (why can't my child be trained like all the other children), often experience power struggles, total frustration or anger with the open defiance of their child. It can be comforting to know that children will still become toilet trained in due time or rather in their own time. Exception to this may occur if the child has a developmental delay or some physical reason that prohibits the child from becoming continent.

Factors about toilet training

- If a parent becomes anxious about training, the child will pick up on the anxiety and may refuse to be trained.
- A child may copy older brother and sisters but the parent cannot force the pace.
- Learning to have control over your bladder and bowel is a complex task for a child. There are so many components to the exercise such as knowing the cues the body is giving, the physical task of removing clothes, wiping the bottom and washing hands. This is a lot to remember especially when all the child wants to do is be outside and playing.
- About 10% of 5 year olds still wet the bed at night.
- Bed wetting programs usually aren't recommended until the child is at least 7 years.
- A child may be toilet trained and then appear to regress at about the age of three. This may just mean that the child's concentration is longer and more focussed on what he /she is playing with and not be aware of the cues that they need to go to the toilet.
- New experiences such a new baby, change of routine, visitors or changing into a new group at day care can cause a set back on the toilet training.

The PSCQ is a project of Health & Community Workforce Council. Noah's Ark Resource Library & Advisory Service is a project of the PSCQ.

The Australian Government, through the Minister for Education Employment & Workplace Relations, funds the Professional Support Coordinator initiative as part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

Suggested strategies

- Try not to over emphasise the whole process. This can result into power struggles between the parent and child.
- Check to see whether the child shows fear or concern when the toilet is flushed. Help the child to see that they can't fall in (use a small toilet seat over the adult toilet seat).
- Create opportunities for the child to be without nappies from time to time. e.g run out in the back yard. Disposable nappies are extremely efficient in absorbing fluids away from the skin. The child may not feel uncomfortable in a wet or dirty nappy.
- Let the child know that you have confidence in him and know that one day he will manage the toilet/potty successfully.
- Set the stage for progressing to using the potty/toilet while the child is still in nappies and required to lie still to be changed by allowing the child to be involved in the nappy changing process such as getting the nappies and handing you the supplies needed. This creates opportunities for the child to develop autonomy and it tells the child that you believe that child is competent in doing tasks.
- Avoid rewards and praise such as stamps or stickers or special treats. Encouraging statements and hugs are more beneficial in the long run.
- Keep lots of spare underpants and clothes to easily defuse the situation if and when an accident occurs.
- If a child is resisting been toilet trained look for natural or environmental factors that may be affecting the situation. Stress in a child's life can affect a child's independence in toileting.
- It is important not to punish the child for any accidents that occur.
- Think about when you are saying "good boy or good girl" when they make it to the toilet. The child may perceive that if they have an accident then they are a "bad girl or bad boy".
- Seek out information from the childcare service your child attends in regards to the policy of toileting. Knowing what staff do may assist in gaining a consistency in approach both at home and in care.

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