

# Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



## Toileting Tots

Toileting advice and strategies for  
Parents/Guardians

What are the common problems?

- 1) **Physical issues:** Before getting started are there any physical or medical reasons for these toileting difficulties such as IBS or constipation. *A urine infection can cause discomfort with urination and lead to “holding it in”. Dietary issues can also cause constipation or diarrhoea.* If you’re concerned then contact your child’s G.P or paediatrician.
- 2) **Language:** Children with delayed speech will have difficulties with understanding and using language. Children with delayed speech and language skills may have difficulties effectively communicating their toileting needs and other ways of communicating may need to be explored.
- 3) **Dressing:** Some children have difficulty with pulling up or down underwear or tolerating certain clothing materials.
- 4) **Fears:** Being afraid of sitting on the toilet or hearing the toilet flush is a common behaviour in young children. Getting a child used to the toilet sound and the feeling of sitting on the toilet can be a gradual process.
- 5) **Need for routine:** Learning new ways to go to the toilet can be hard to grasp, but once a routine has been decided upon.....stick to it! Familiar and regular routines can reduce anxiety and help a child understand what is expected of them.
- 6) **Using different toilets:** Some children who learn a toileting routine at home or nursery may struggle to apply this to different or unfamiliar settings such as public toilets.
- 7) **Sensory challenges:** In order for your little one to know when to go to the potty/ toilet, they must be able to receive and interpret sensory information from the body that signals a full bowel or bladder. Sensory information from the bowel and bladder is more subtle than from other muscles, making the urge hard to recognise and toilet training challenging. Children may also have difficulty discerning the sensation of wet pants from dry pants. Others may have trouble sitting still long enough to go to the toilet, or figuring out the process of how to get themselves onto the toilet successfully.

## Where do I Start?

Below are some toileting tips that may help your child when starting toileting training:

☒ **Keep it short.** Introduce your child to the toilet/potty by encouraging your child to sit on it. Keep some toys or books handy to occupy them whilst they sit. At first these visits may be short in duration however as your progress these will increase.

☒ **Get into a routine..** Don't ask your child if they need to use the toilet as they may not understand this at first. Instead, use a phrase such as 'potty/toilet time' and take them to the toilet/potty every couple of hours.

☒ **Schedule toilet trips around your lifestyle.** Make toilet trips part of your everyday life. Plan the toilet trips around your usual household routine. Stick with the same times of the day or the same daily activities.

☒ **Communicate.** Use the same clear phrases, signs or pictures during each trip. This helps a child learn toileting language and reduces confusion or frustration.

☒ **Be consistent:** Once you outline the routine and methods, keep working towards the same goal. If your child is looked after by a relative or attends a child care setting be sure to let them know your child's toileting/potty routine.

☒ **Make a Visual Schedule.** Pictures may help your child know what to expect during toilet trips (see toilet plan example later in this booklet). Take pictures of items in your bathroom (e.g., toilet, toilet paper). Place the pictures in order on a piece of paper to show your child each step of the toilet trip. There also are websites with toileting pictures that you can print out or toileting charts you can purchase. If your child does not yet understand pictures, you may show your child actual objects (e.g., a roll of toilet paper) for each step.

☒ **Give lots of praise.** For each little step, like sitting on the potty, washing hands or getting dressed praise can be very beneficial. Some children respond to rewards however these should be instant such as a sticker.

☒ **Be Supportive and calm.** Use encouraging positive language and lots of praise even for the smallest step forward. Potty training is a skill which may take some time to learn.

### Example Visual Toileting Programme

A visual programme is a display of what is going to happen throughout the day or during an activity. A visual programme is helpful during toilet trips to decrease anxiety and difficulty with transitions by clearly letting your child know when certain activities will occur.

- 1) **Consider how many stages your child is able to understand.**
- 2) **Make sure you picture clearly show/represent the activity.**
- 4) **Pictures can easily be downloaded from internet sites however some children may understand actual real life photographs for easily.**

### **VISUAL SCHEDULE**



### **Sensory Strategies for toilet training**

- Some children may feel insecure when sitting on a high or adult sized toilet. Consider the use of toilet seat inserts to reduce the aperture size of the toilet and provide more security and comfort for your child. Some of these seats have fixed handles which your child may find supportive to hold on to.
- The texture of toilet seats can be distressing or uncomfortable for some children. Consider the use of padded seat covers to support this.
- Encourage boys to sit down to pass urine as they may feel more secure and empty their bladder or bowels more efficiently.
- Provide a foot stool for an adult sized toilet or use a potty chair to allow your child's feet to rest on a stable surface and to increase stability when seated.
- Consider the bathroom environment. Is the lighting too bright or too dim, are there any distracting noises such as a fan and are there any strong smells such as bleach or bathroom products that would cause your child to avoid the bathroom entirely.
- The type of toilet paper can be an important factor for children. Consider the texture and scent of these before trying them.
- Should the bathroom door be open or closed during toileting? What is your child's preference?
- Children who are sensitive to loud or unexpected noises may prefer you to flush the toilet after they have left the room. Consider using ear defenders to help drown out flushing and hand-dryer noises when using public toilets.

### **Further useful resources**

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk) (children's bowel and bladder charity)

[www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk) (Bladder and bowel UK)

**TOILETING EQUIPMENT IDEAS**

Toilet inserts:



Padded toilet seat with handles.



Family toilet seats incorporate adult and child size seats together.





Ladder training steps have child size seats and handles to help child feel more secure when accessing the toilet.



Toilet steps help children to step up to access the toilet or to step and reach the sink for hand washing.



Modular steps are also available in some High Street retailers. These are layers of steps which join together allowing the height to be adjusted to suit the individual user.



[www.nhs.uk/ggc/kids](http://www.nhs.uk/ggc/kids)



Large/supportive potty chairs

