

TOILET LEARNING

an extract from
Porter, L. (2006). *Children are people too*,
(4th ed.) Adelaide, East Street.



It is very difficult to toilet train children before the age of 2 years and 3 months. If they have older brothers or sisters, they might make up their own minds to be trained before this, but you cannot force the pace on this one.

The usual principle is to start in the children's third summer. If you start when the children are developmentally ready to learn the skill, they will learn it in a few weeks; if you start too early, it can take months and, meanwhile, both the child and you become stressed over the issue, sometimes prolonging the time it takes to learn the skill far beyond the usual age.

As with eating, you can only ask for appropriate behaviour such as taking off their underwear or sitting on the potty or toilet, but you cannot force children to be toilet trained unless they decide to be.

Anxiety

If you become anxious about the training, or if you want your children to be trained by a certain date, they might pick up on this anxiety and in turn refuse to be trained at all. Therefore, if training is proving unsuccessful because of too much pressure, it might pay to abandon it for the time being. Set a new starting date, and in the meantime explain to the children that now that they are growing up on the outside, you know that they will soon be ready to grow up on the inside, by learning to do a wee like a big three-year-old (or whatever age they will be at their next birthday) – see below.

Three-year-olds

Some children are toilet trained quite successfully until they turn three, and then have a series of accidents again. This comes about because their improved concentration span leads to fewer natural breaks in their play during which they could notice the warning sensations of the need to use the toilet. You might deal with this by telling three-year-olds that needing to do a wee can sneak up on them, and so they will need to think extra hard to remember to be boss of their sneaky wee's. You can also periodically remind them to go to the toilet – that is, revert to toilet timing for a few months until their concentration skills reach the next level (near four years of age) of being able to alternate their focus – in this case, from their activity to their physical sensations.

Privacy

Learning to use the toilet coincides with the age when children become aware of their bodies. Furthermore, in an effort to avoid their exposure to abuse, many of us have already taught children about privacy. Hence, some children will be very sensitive to using the toilet in view of others. This can be an issue when the toilets at child care

or preschool are open to view (as they often are) or lack doors on the front of the stalls. If this seems to be an issue for your child, advocate that he or she be allowed to use a more private toilet.

Avoid controlling discipline

Do not punish children for toileting accidents. On the other hand, do not tell them that they are a 'good' boy or girl when they use the potty or toilet because this implies that they are a 'bad' boy or girl when they have an accident. And avoid reward systems such as star charts because these make you more responsible for their behaviour than the children are (– see Porter, 2006, or the paper on 'Praise' on this website for more detail about the disadvantages of reward systems). Rewards can set up resistance, particularly in spirited children (see the paper on *Spirited children* on this website). Children with a strong need to be in command of themselves perceive that, when we deliver rewards or punishments, we are trying to manipulate them into doing things our way. They react by being even more resistant than they were.

This can escalate to the point where the children utterly refuse to use the toilet. This can come about when we attempt to control so many aspects of their lives and behaviour, that retaining control of their own bodies becomes the only form of control left to them. In that case, you will need to institute a guidance approach to parenting that teaches, rather than attempts to control, children – see Porter (2006).

Growing up on the inside

When children approaching four years of age are still having difficulty learning toileting, you can explain to them that there is a secret about growing up that hardly anyone knows: the secret is that growing up occurs in two places: outside, and inside.

Next, you can observe that they are growing up on the outside in just the right way for a person their age: they are *this* tall, can stand on one leg, can run fast, have strong muscles and so on. But, on the inside, their tummy has forgotten to grow up to be able to do a wee (or poo) like a bigger child. (You could use bladder and bowel, rather than tummy, but children of this age aren't likely to understand that.)

Next, you can explain that this is okay: it happens to a lot of children. But, now that they are having a birthday soon (or the end of the year is coming, or some other event is imminent), this is the right time to start *thinking* about growing up on the inside as well. You are confident that their tummies will be able to grow up, because they are expert in growing up (as demonstrated by their outsides). You know that they will be able to teach their tummy to grow up too – when they are ready.

You cannot give them suggestions about how to achieve this or try to talk them into growing up, or they would not want to. Instead, caution them they should a long time to think about it, as it is a big step.

BED WETTING

Around 10 percent of five-year-olds still wet the bed at night. For this reason, pediatricians generally do not recommend bedwetting programs until children are aged seven or so. In the meantime, check out food sensitivities if you suspect these because they can make children sleep so deeply that they do not awaken when their bladder becomes full.

To make wet beds as easy as possible to cope with, ensure that the bedding is easy to wash. Ask children over four to help you to strip the bed so that they take some responsibility for keeping it dry in future. Before this age, though, just get on with it as calmly as you can and remember that 17-year-olds don't wet their beds, so your children *will* be trained eventually.

PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS

For older children who still cannot control their bladder or bowel, it is vital that you consult a pediatrician to rule out physical causes. Sometimes children become so constipated and the bowel so distended that the muscles in the bowel cannot contract to allow the children to eliminate.

A second physical cause to rule out is children's balance skills. Sometimes, children are fearful of sitting on a toilet or potty because their balance is not stable. Ensure that you give them an insert for the toilet, and a footstool for them to rest their feet on and, if necessary, a hand rail that they can hold to stabilise themselves. If balance is an ongoing problem, see a physiotherapist for an assessment, as toileting will not be the only skill affected.

A third (less orthodox) possibility to consider is food intolerances. In my experience, children with food sensitivities can sleep so deeply that the pressure on the bladder does not wake them and, consequently, they wet their beds. I find that these children benefit from a treatment known as bioresonance, which uses a computer to detect what is irritating their nervous systems and causing such a deep sleep, and to rebalance their neurotransmitter and stress hormone levels as necessary.

Bioresonance treatment is based on biophysics, rather than biochemistry, which is the basis of traditional medicine. Biophysics picks up on the signals between cells – such as the signals to bronchial cells to swell up upon contact with pollens – and shuts down those signals that are not healthy. This line of thought and the treatment may seem unorthodox; however, for certain conditions, I have found that little else works.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Porter, L. (2006). *Children are people too: A parent's guide to young children's behaviour*. (4th ed.) Adelaide, SA: East Street Publications.

www.bioresonance.net.au

www.louiseporter.com.au