

## CHILDREN'S OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ADVICE SHEET

### Developing Toileting Skills

Toilet training is an important part of a child becoming independent. Children develop this skill at different ages. It will take some children longer than others to develop toileting skills. Although some children may continue to require some support to stay clean and dry it is good to work towards developing children's toileting skills.

#### **Preparation**

- Before starting toilet training it is important that your child is not constipated as this can impact on the success of developing independence. If you feel your child may be constipated you should seek advice from their G.P
- All 'poo/wee' related activity e.g. nappy changes should happen in the toilet/bathroom, store nappies there if possible.
- When changing their nappy do it when they are standing this encourages increased participation from your child.
- Encourage your child to sit on the potty/toilet at nappy changes (boys and girls).
- Talk about 'poo's and wee' for instance by reading books/social stories on children using the toilet. Explain to your child you are changing their nappy because they have done a 'poo' or a 'wee' so they start to hear this language more frequently.
- Keep the family toilet door open whenever possible when others are using the toilet to show your child others using the toilet.
- Make sure your child is wearing clothes that are easy to take down and pull up.
- Plan suitable rewards e.g. stickers, time with a favourite toy, verbal praise, cuddles.
- Placing pants or a piece of kitchen roll inside their nappy can help to increase their ability to feel when they are wet helping them to understand when then needed to go to the toilet/potty. If placing kitchen roll/pants inside a nappy your child will need to be changed as soon as they are soiled to ensure their skin does not become sore.
- Prepare for accidents for example by having a change of clothing and absorbent seat covers.
- When first starting toilet/potty training it is useful to begin when you have a few quiet days at home. When you do need to go out with your child if possible continue to encourage your child to wear their pants rather than their nappy – preparing for any accidents. If this is not going to be feasible or practical e.g. car journeys place a nappy over their pants so they continue to feel when they are wet. Having a portable potty/toilet insert can be useful when going out.

#### **Preparation continued - Environment**

The following can impact on a child's ability to develop toileting skills and therefore should be considered:

- Get a suitable potty/toilet seat (carry in bag if out). The child should be able to sit in a stable position with their feet flat on the floor or on a stool. It can be easier to go to the toilet if the child's knees are above their hips. Equipment that you can buy from the high street that can help achieve this position include a toilet insert, foot stool or potty. If they still do not appear stable please discuss this with an occupational therapist.



- Some children prefer the toilet with a foot stool and toilet insert other children prefer a potty. Be led by your child as to which they prefer. It is worth bearing in mind some children can find the transition from potty to toilet challenging and you may prefer to see if they are happy to sit on a toilet from the start.
- Ensure the child is comfortable when sat on the toilet/potty. Some children do not like sitting on a hard toilet seat and may benefit from an alternative one that is a more moulded shape or soft.
- If the child dislikes the smell of toilets it can be useful to give them something strong to smell when they are using the toilet.
- Is the child afraid of noises in the bathroom such as hand dryers or flushing? They may benefit from wearing headphones or humming to themselves when in the bathroom. Labelling the emotion and reassuring the child is important in order to decrease their anxieties. Children may benefit from getting used to the sounds when not using the toilet e.g. flushing the toilet for fun
- Placing pictures of a favourite character on the bathroom walls or decorating the potty can make the child more relaxed when using the toilet/potty
- Having wet wipes may make it easier to clean your child after they have been to the toilet.

## Developing a routine

- Gradually increase the time the child sits on the toilet/potty. At first your child may not want to sit on the potty/toilet or only sit on it for a few seconds before getting up. Allow your child to go at their own pace making the experience as positive as possible. A child should not be forced to sit on the toilet/potty.
- If after a few minutes of sitting on the toilet/potty your child has not needed to use the toilet help them to get dressed again. They do not need to sit on the toilet for an excessive amount of time waiting to urinate or open their bowels.
- Children may be more encouraged to sit on a toilet/potty if they have a 'toilet toy'. This could be a book or a favourite figure that they only have when sat on the potty. Screen use should be avoided when on a toilet/potty.
- Establish regular times for toileting e.g. take the child to the toilet at the start of the day, after meal times and just before bed. As your child becomes more confident in sitting on the toilet/potty encourage them to initially sit on it at least every 2-3 hours.
- Monitor when your child is having drinks and food and when they have a wet or dirty nappy for a few days. This can help identify any patterns so guide when your child may need to use the toilet.
- If a child uses a visual timetable build in toileting times as part of a natural sequence of events.
- Remember to build dressing and hand washing into toileting routines so that the child learns the full sequence of behaviours during toileting

## Helping your child develop their skills

- When your child is ready take them out of their nappy during the day, put pants on them and go for it! Do this for at least a few days to help them learn and determine the progress they are making. Wearing a nappy reduces the sensation of urination and therefore can make toilet training more difficult.
- It is recommended that children should first learn to urinate and open their bowels whilst sat on the toilet including boys.



- Use a clear explanation or visual clue as to what is the desired behaviour e.g. put poo from the nappy into the toilet
- Use visual prompts/pictures to help your child understand when it is time to sit on the toilet. If your child has a speech and language therapist liaise with them about what visual prompts may be most beneficial.
- Increase fluid intake several minutes prior to toileting
- Minimise distractions when they are sitting on the potty/toilet
- Ensure the child is relaxed when sat on the toilet. Blowing bubbles can help a child to relax.
- If your child does not want to have their nappy taken off you could start by loosening it but encouraging your child to still sit on the toilet/potty with it on. Over time gradually loosen it more until you can remove it.
- Prepare for accidents. When an accident happens stay calm and relaxed and never shame your child. If your child will, encourage them to sit on the toilet/potty whilst you get them clean to help them associate where they needed to urinate or open their bowels. Reassure your child that accidents can happen and they are learning.

#### **Make using the toilet fun!**

- Musical potties can provide motivation
- Put up pictures around the toilet
- Put a few drops of food colouring in the bowl to colour the water. Each time the child flushes the toilet you can add a different colour.
- Make a reward chart and give special stickers every time your child wees or poos in the toilet.

#### **Useful resources**

- Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism or Other Developmental Issues (Paperback)  
by Carol Stock Kranowitz (Foreword), Maria Wheeler (Author)
- Education and Resources for Improving Childhood continence – E.R.I.C.  
Available at: <http://www.eric.org.uk/>