

TOILET TRAINING RESISTANCE

Children who refuse to be toilet trained wet themselves, soil themselves, or try to hold back their bowel movements (thus becoming constipated). Some children also refuse to sit on the toilet or will use the toilet only if a parent brings up the subject and marches them into the bathroom.

Any child who is over 2 ½ years old, healthy, and not toilet trained after several months of trying can be assumed to be resistant to the process. Consider how capable your child is at delaying bowel movements until he or she is off the toilet or you are on the telephone. More practice runs will not help. Instead your child needs full responsibility and some incentives to spark his motivation.

The most common cause of resistance to toilet training is that a child has been reminded or lectured too much. Some children have been forced to sit on the toilet against their will, occasionally for long periods of time. A few have been spanked or punished in other ways for not cooperating. Many parents make these mistakes, especially if they have a strong-willed child.

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH DAYTIME WETTING OR SOILING

Most children less than 5 or 6 years old who soil or wet their pants and have no symptoms of illness are simply engaged with you in a power struggle. These children can be helped with the following suggestions. If your child holds back bowel movements and becomes constipated, medicines will also be needed, so first talk with your child's physician. If your child also wets the bed, work on the daytime wetting first because it will be much easier to change.

- Transfer all responsibility to your child. Your child will decide to use the toilet after he realizes that he has nothing left to resist. Have one last talk with him about the subject. Tell your child that his body makes “pee” and “poop” every day and it belongs to him. Tell him that his “poop” wants to be in the toilet and his job is to help the “poop” get out. Tell your child you're sorry you punished him, forced him to sit on the toilet, or reminded him so much. Tell him from now on he doesn't need any help. Then stop all talk about this subject. When your child stops getting attention for not using the toilet, he will eventually decide to use the toilet for attention.
- Generally stop all reminders about using the toilet.

Let your child decide when he needs to go to the bathroom. Do not remind him to go to the bathroom and do not ask him if he needs to go. He knows what it feels like when he has to “poop” or “pee” and where the bathroom is. Reminders are a form of

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pressure, and pressure doesn't work. He should not be made to sit on the toilet against his will because this will foster a negative attitude about the whole process.

Some children have never used the toilet and in the beginning will need a pleasant reminder once a day when they are clearly holding back. You can say, "Do you know how you can make your tummy feel better? After your tummy gets rid of the poop, it will feel good." However, don't go with your child into the bathroom or stand with him by the potty-chair. He needs to get the feeling of success that comes from doing it on his own and then finding you to tell you what he did.

- Give incentives for using the toilet.

If your child stays clean and dry, he needs plenty of positive feedback, such as praise, smiles, and hugs. This positive response should occur every time your child uses the toilet. If a child soils or wets himself on some days consider taking 20 extra minutes to play a special game with you child or take him for a walk to the playground. Sometimes special incentives, such as favorite sweets, can be invaluable. For using the toilet, err on the side of giving him too much (for example, a handful each time). If you want a breakthrough, make you child an offer he can't refuse.

- Give stars for using the toilet.

Get a calendar for your child and post it in a conspicuous location. Place a star on it every time he uses the toilet. Keep this record of progress until your child has gone 2 weeks without any accidents.

- If you child has never sat on the toilet, try to change his attitude.

Give him choices by asking if he wants to use the big toilet or the potty-chair. If your child has been having bowel movements in his pants, he may need a pleasant reminder once a day when he is clearly holding back. You can say, "The poop is trying to get out and go in the toilet. The poop needs your help."

A few children temporarily may need rewards for simply sitting on the toilet and trying. However, don't accompany your child to the potty-chair or bathroom and don't stand with him by the potty-chair. He needs to do it on his own.

- Remind your child to change his clothes if he wets or soils himself.

As soon as you notice that your child has wet or messy pants, ask him to clean himself up immediately. The main role you have is to enforce this rule. If you child is wet, he can probably change into his dry clothes by himself. If your child is soiled, he will probably need you help with cleanup, but keep him involved. Have him rinse the

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soiled underwear in the toilet. He may think this is “yucky” and be motivated to keep his pants clean.

- Don’t punish or criticize you child for accidents.

Respond gently to accidents, and do not allow siblings to tease the child. Do not put your child back into diapers unless he is taking laxatives or stool softeners. Punishment or criticism will only delay successful training and it could cause emotional problems.

- Ask the preschool or day care staff to use the same strategy.

Ask you child’s teacher or day care provider to let your child go to the bathroom any time he wants to. Keep an extra set of clean underwear at the school or with the daycare provider.

CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT IF:

- Your child holds back his bowel movements or becomes constipated
- Pain or burning occurs when he urinates.
- Your child’s resistance has not improved after you have followed these suggestions for 1 month.
- The resistance has not stopped completely after 3 months.