

“What Parents Should Know About... Toilet Training”

How Will I Know When My Child Is Ready?

Girls are usually ready for toilet training around age two while most boys are not ready until two and a half but readiness varies greatly. A child will show interest in using a potty when they are ready to try it themselves. Do not force the issue if your child is not ready. Be patient. If there is no interest, put the potty-chair away and try again in a few weeks.

My Child Seems Ready...Now What?

- Put a potty-chair in the bathroom several days before you start potty training so your child can get used to it being there.
- When you change your child’s diapers, talk about why you are changing it: “Bobby went potty or had a BM,” “Cindy went peepee in her diaper,” so children can learn to say words that let you know they need to go to the bathroom. Some children pull at their diaper, your hand, or your clothing to communicate their need to go.
- Dressing a child in loose fitting training pants allows him/her to pull them off and on easily.
- Take your child to the bathroom each time he/she wants to go but do not insist he/she stay long or do anything.
- Do not give your child a lot of toys to play with or books to read. Too many distractions can keep a child from remembering the purpose of being in the bathroom.
- Sit with your child the first couple of times. After that, leave for short periods of time and come back. This will help him/her get used to going to the bathroom on his/her own.
- **BE PATIENT. PRAISE YOUR CHILD FOR SUCCESS. DO NOT PUNISH FOR “ACCIDENTS.” HUGS AND PRAISE FOR SUCCESS WORKS BEST!**

Remember: about 15% of children still have problems always staying dry during the day even at age six. This should not be considered disobedience or unusual. Children usually wet their pants because their attention is on something else.

And what about staying dry at night?...

Bedwetting

Bedwetting, or enuresis, can be a frustrating and embarrassing situation for both the parent and the child involved. But wetting the bed at night is a concern for millions of children and even some adults. Children need to be assured that there is nothing “odd” about them or that it is their fault.

Facts About Bedwetting

- Five to seven million children over six years old are persistent bedwetters
- Thousands of adults have nocturnal enuresis
- There are two kinds of enuresis:
 - Primary: never has been dry at night

- Secondary: was dry at night in past but is now wetting the bed again
- Primary enuresis is the most common kind of bed-wetting. It is more common in boys and tends to run in families.
- Secondary enuresis can be a sign of a medical problem (such as bladder infection, constipation, or diabetes) or a sudden emotional stress (such as moving or having a new baby at home), causing the child's behavior to regress.
- Many parents think that bed-wetting is a sleep problem but it's not.
- Bed-wetting is often caused by the immature development of a hormone known as ADH which controls the amount and concentration of urine produced at night. So children with enuresis often produce more urine than their bladder can hold and if they do not wake up, the child ends up wetting the bed.
- Enuresis is also not necessarily a sign of psychological or emotional problems. It is not a sign of bad parenting or a sign that the child is bad, willful or lazy. On the contrary, punishing a child who suffers from enuresis can cause emotional problems through humiliation and lowered self-esteem.

What Does Not Work?

Well-meaning parents have tried countless ways to help their children stop wetting the bed. The following items have been shown not to work and can be abusive.

- Sleeping on a hard or uncomfortable surface.
- Making a child sleep on his/her back.
- Bladder or rectal irrigation.
- Elevating the foot of the bed.

What Should I Do?

1. Seek medical attention—
 - If your child is at least six or seven years old and has never been able to stay dry through the night.
 - If your child is younger than six but is troubled by the bed-wetting.
 - If your child was once able to stay dry but has begun bed-wetting again.
2. If troubles are also occurring at school, speaking to the teacher about the situation may be good if the teacher is understanding and trustworthy.

ABOVE ALL ELSE, PRAISE YOUR CHILD FOR EVERY SUCCESS AND NEVER SHAME HIM/HER FOR FAILURE.

Sources: Guide to Your Child's Symptoms, Villard, 1997.

National Enuresis Society (NES) Home Page. <http://www.peds.umn.edu/Centers/NES>, 1998.