



Mainstream School Outreach Therapy Services Vranch House School & Centre

TOILETING ADVICE

Many children with co-ordination problems have difficulty with bottom wiping and the whole process of going to the toilet, from start to finish. It can cause anxiety for the child and the parent, and can go on for much longer than the parents expect or want to tolerate. The child then finds strategies for avoiding the whole situation and will even hide pants, soil, and may not take responsibility for their own actions.

The child with co-ordination problems may have low muscle tone and this can affect their bowel tone, making it harder to recognise when they need to go, as well as having less control when pushing the stools out.

Which 'bit' is the problem for your child and what can you do to help...

1. When does your child go?

Does your child have a regular bowel habit that means he/she goes at the same time each day? Does this vary from day to day, or is it a mad rush when they get home from school to reach the toilet? A regular routine can take a lot of the stress and rush out of this.

2. How often do they go?

Do they open their bowels once a week, or three times a day? Are the stools soft or hard? If he/she is constipated then the stools need softening, and if they have loose stools, then they need them to be made more bulky.

3. How much does your child drink and how much do they eat?

If the child is avoiding going to the toilet they may also be avoiding drinking. This can cause constipation. Try increasing the fibre in their diet with fruit, salads and vegetables as this will make the stools bulkier. The child with low tone may not be getting the message telling them to go until it is too late, so this dietary adjustment may help them.

4. Try to get a rhythm

After a meal there is a gastro-colic reflex that stimulates the bowel, so encourage your child to go after breakfast for example. If they already gone then they won't be worrying about it all day in school or have a tummy ache.

5. Can they perch?

Do they feel safe on the toilet or do they think that they will fall into the hole or fall off? Consider using a child toilet seat even with an older child. Are their feet dangling? If so, put a step or telephone directory under their feet. This means that they are able to use their legs to help them balance and make them feel more stable.

6. Have you wet wipes or toilet paper?

Does your child need to move to reach them or are they close at hand? If they can see them, they are more likely to remember to use them. The more surface area he/she has to wipe with, the more likelihood there will be a success.

7. What happens in school?

Negotiating the school toilets may cause great concern. There are several stages in the process that may result in problems: the first being getting to and from the classroom. Direction is often a problem, and the child may get lost and therefore take more time than is expected, causing anxiety. Try to let the teacher know that he/she has a difficulty that may mean they have to go to the toilet at short notice and may need to go more often than other children.

8. Getting undressed

The second stage in going to the toilet at school is getting undressed and doing buttons and zips. The child may have new trousers that are difficult to undo and may well be in a hurry to remove them. This may be the cause of the accident which may add to anxiety.

9. The wiping bit

If they need to open their bowels and wipe their own bottom, this may be an additional problem. They may forget to wipe altogether or not wipe successfully. This may be due to sequencing problems i.e. they went because they needed to, but has now forgotten the next stage in the sequence. They may have poor balance and may not be stable enough to let go of the seat or wall to wipe themselves effectively. It is also important that the child is able to fold the toilet tissue as this can be tricky.

10. The stress

This can be one reason why some children avoid going to the toilet at all during the school day and end up having accidents. Some children become constipated, holding it in until they get home. Instead of concentrating on their lessons they are spending time thinking about going to, or avoiding the toilet. They may also complain of tummy aches. At a stage when they are trying to attain new skills alongside their peers, the added problems they have can cause huge anxiety for the child. Many of these tasks put added pressure on a child who is trying to learn and make friends

Tips to help

- Ensure the child is well balanced when sitting on the toilet and can use at least one hand freely, rather than for holding on to a surface to maintain balance.
- Make sure they can pull clothes up and down easily.
- Give them a small packet of wet wipes to take to school in their pocket or school bag.
- Let the teacher know there is a problem - discreetly.
- Make sure the child knows where the toilets are before they start a new school or classroom.
- Change may be slow so be patient - the problems may have been there for some time, and won't improve suddenly.
- Ignore mistakes.

- Praise them for trying – they may not be having the sensations that tell them when they
- need to go and you may need to work out a timetable to remind them.
- Use a watch with a buzzer to remind them when to go.
- Remember, there are very few adults with these difficulties, time will sort out a lot
- of problems.

**If you would like more information, please contact the Therapy Department
Vranch House School direct on 01392 468558**

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