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Centre for Child & Youth Development
Centre du développement des enfants et des adolescents

Kingston Health Sciences Centre
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TOILETING INDEPENDENCE

To achieve continence, a child must master a series of separate skills:

1. **Feel the urge**
2. **Hold it in**
3. **Communicate the need**
4. **Get to the toilet**
5. **Pull down pants and underwear**
6. **Sit on the toilet**
7. **Relax**
8. **Urinate/defecate**
9. **Wipe**
10. **Get off the toilet**
11. **Pull up pants**
12. **Flush**
13. **Wash**

Feel the urge and hold it in: When thinking about toileting readiness, you will have to watch your child closely to see if there is any indication that they "feel the urge". Do they go to the same spot at home when having a bowel movement? Do they stand very still or have a certain expression when they are going in their diaper? These are indications that a child can feel the urge and *may* have the ability to 'hold it in'.

Communicate the need: It is important that your child is able to communicate that they need to go. If they are using words, it is important to teach them the bathroom words you use in your home. If they are not yet using words but are demonstrating some understanding of bathroom concepts, you can try using picture symbols that a child can point to or bring to you, to indicate that they need to go.

Sitting and relaxing: Practice sit-down times **the goal of this is to learn the essential skill of relaxing while sitting**. Typically, practicing sit-downs 30 minutes after meals (to take advantage of gastrocolic reflex) works well. A sit-down time should be approximately 10 minutes and the goal is learning to be relaxed on the toilet (not necessarily to produce urine or stool).

Toileting concepts: Understanding concepts– learning the difference between wet and dry, clean and dirty, up and down.

Some children have GI problems that can make it difficult to toilet train. Both too loose and too hard stools can interfere with the successful development of continence. It is important to try to address any GI concerns so that the child is having regular bowel movements they can *feel* and *control.*

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Sitting on the toilet: Sitting on the toilet like parents, siblings and/or peers is often exciting for children and they are eager to do it. In other cases, where a child is reluctant to sit on the toilet, it may help to allow them to engage in a favorite activity or hold a favorite toy while sitting. This toy might be kept only in the bathroom.

***Remember:** Even if a child is not ready to master *all* of toilet training (ie. go without pull-ups), the separate skills above can be practiced. Learning to sit and relax on the toilet with "sit-down times" can be practiced. Learning to communicate about the toilet (using words, signs or using picture symbols for toilet, poo, pee etc.) can be practiced. Practicing dressing skills (pants down and up), wiping, flushing and handwashing can also be done.

Summarized from "Toilet Training: Strategies for Success in Children with Developmental Disabilities" by Alison Schonwald, MD. Harvard Medical School, June 30, 2009

This handout is intended as a general guide to provide information, strategies and activity suggestions to promote skill development.