



Parent Notes

# Module 3

**Toilet Learning: Replacing difficult behaviour with useful behaviour**

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## In brief

### **In this module you will learn how to:**

- identify reasons for your child's difficult behaviour related to toileting.
- select strategies to encourage your child to attend the toilet.
- use planned ignoring when you are changing your child's nappy/pull-up.
- encourage regular toileting opportunities and use attention and positive consequences for appropriate behaviour.
- provide a trigger for appropriate behaviour when a trigger for difficult behaviour occurs.
- follow the flowchart to plan your strategy.

# Reasons for difficult behaviour



**See Module 3 Pages 6-8**

## **Engaging in a preferred activity**

Wetting or soiling in inappropriate places for some children is not a deliberate difficult behaviour – they may be unsure about what the toilet is used for or may not know that there is an alternative behaviour to soiling or wetting on the floor or in their clothes.

In the context of toilet learning skills, passing urine or a bowel motion in clothing could be referred to as a preferred activity. Also nappy changes can provide a child with positive consequences such as one-on-one time and attention. Nappy changing requires very little effort or thought from the child, so having a nappy changed could be considered a preferred activity to attending the toilet.

## **Escaping from a task**

Some children may see toileting as a task they wish to avoid. They may be quite happy with the nappy changing procedure that has been occurring since birth.

As adults we would be embarrassed to wet or soil our pants, but many children with an intellectual disability do not have this association yet.

Some children may see toileting as a task that takes them away from an activity that they enjoy, such as watching TV or playing.

Some children may feel uncomfortable on the toilet or in the bathroom (the room may be cold, cramped, the smell different and so on).

If you request your child to attend the toilet and do not follow through with the toileting task because your child is objecting, your child's difficult behaviour has achieved its goal – escaping the toileting task.

## **Obtaining physical pleasure**

Some children's toileting behaviours may be the result of obtaining physical pleasure. Children who play with their bowel motions may enjoy the feel or enjoy finger painting with it.

## Escaping pain

Children who have had a history of constipation or painful bowel motions may refuse to sit on the toilet. Their experience may be that a bowel motion is painful and that they have more control if they pass the motion while standing up. Therefore a child with painful bowel motions may display difficult behaviour that helps them avoid pain e.g. 'holding-on' to bowel motions to avoid attending the toilet.

If a child has anal fissures this can cause pain when trying to pass a bowel motion. If your child has had a history of constipation or you feel that there may be constipation, please consult your continence nurse professional or doctor.

### IN FOCUS

#### Constipation

Constipation can be difficult to identify. Some children will present with very loose bowel motions that are difficult to control. Parents may find traces of faeces on the child's nappy or underwear (commonly referred to as smears or 'skid marks').

This condition is known as encopresis. It results from a history of constipation in which a hard bowel motion remains in the rectum, with only very loose faeces passing around it. If you feel that your child might have some difficulties with his bowels, contact your doctor, who will, in most cases, do an x-ray and recommend treatment.

# Encouraging alternative behaviour



**See Module 3 Pages 12–25**

## Selecting an alternative behaviour

When teaching toileting skills, the alternative behaviour to wetting a nappy or clothing would be passing urine in the toilet. As you have learned in Module 1, toileting skills involve many smaller skills that need to be achieved before urine and bowel movements end up in the toilet. Alternative behaviour can be either:

- a communication skill or
- a skill of independence.

As you develop your child's toileting skills it's important to ensure that she understands what the toilet is for. And it's also important to provide lots of opportunities for your child to see you using the toilet – children learn best through observing and copying.

## Ensuring no consequences for difficult behaviour

The examples in the Signposts program DVD show a mother successfully using planned ignoring. You can also use this technique when your child protests your instruction to attend the toilet. Ignore your child's protests and continue to direct her to attend the toilet, making sure she understands the toileting behaviour you expect from her. For example if your child has learnt how to sit on the toilet successfully, ignore her protests and continue to give clear instructions about how to sit on the toilet.

## Providing negative consequences for difficult behaviour

The use of the word 'No' is important because it signals to your child that she has done something unacceptable. You should say the word 'No' if you actually observe your child passing urine or a bowel motion not in the toilet. (For this to happen your child would have to be wearing underwear or you would have to be very observant and look for facial expressions that suggest she is passing urine or using her bowels.)

After you have said 'No' in a firm voice, provide your child with a toileting opportunity and reinforce the preferred activity of passing urine or a bowel motion in the toilet.

**Taking away privileges/Using time out**

When your child is in the process of learning toileting skills, it is best not to take away privileges or to use time out. However once she can successfully attend the toilet, but chooses not to, it might be appropriate in some circumstances to take away privileges.

**When the purpose is sometimes acceptable**

Sometimes your child might demonstrate difficult behaviour when not at home, such as protesting about going to the toilet or refusing to sit on the toilet, even though she may have successfully learnt how to attend the toilet at home.

There may be acceptable reasons for this kind of behaviour in unfamiliar places. For example, public toilets can be very noisy with the sounds of hand dryers and other people using the facilities. Or a child might not understand what urinals are for in public male toilets.

In unfamiliar situations the purpose of your child's difficult toileting behaviour (i.e. escaping the toileting task) may be considered acceptable until she develops the skills to use unfamiliar toilets.

When you are teaching your child toileting skills it is important to slowly introduce her to as many different toilets as possible. When you do this, do not expect your child to use the toilet, just show her the cubicle. When she is more comfortable with toileting, you can begin to get her to sit on different toilets and use the facilities.

**When the purpose is to gain attention**

Children often demonstrate difficult behaviour as a way of seeking attention. If this is the case, it is important not to give attention to difficult behaviour related to toileting.

## IN FOCUS

### Difficult toileting behaviour to gain attention

Ella's teachers have been working on toilet learning for a number of months. Ella has developed many skills: she is able to locate the toilet-room, sit for three minutes, pass urine in the toilet, wipe herself, flush and wash her hands. She has good communication skills and can alert those around her to her needs.

At school she has become very close to one of the teaching assistants, Amy, who is responsible for toileting the children. Amy also enjoys Ella's company and they enjoy singing while Ella sits on the toilet. Ella has been regularly toileted at school, but half an hour after she has been given an opportunity to use the toilet she will wet her nappy and request to attend the toilet with Amy. We could summarise this as follows:

- Trigger: Ella wishes to spend more time with Amy singing.
- Behaviour: Ella wets nappy and requests to attend toilet.
- Consequence: Ella gets to sing songs with Amy while sitting on the toilet.

### When the purpose is to escape from attention

If your child is demonstrating difficult toileting behaviour to escape from attention, explain to your child 'This is not a time that you are allowed to go away'. Continue to provide her with a toileting opportunity. When the time for no escape is over, provide a positive consequence for the child if she has attended the toilet.

In some cases children may wish to escape from attention due to a wish for privacy. They may not feel comfortable with you or others watching them use the toilet.



**When the purpose is to engage in a preferred activity**

The following example shows how difficult toileting behaviour can be used to engage in a preferred activity.

Jason's parents are currently helping him to develop his toileting skills. He is successfully attending the toilet when asked and is enjoying developing his new skill. His parents have noted that at times when they ask him to attend the toilet Jason is refusing and instead is watching TV (preferred activity).

**When the purpose is to escape a task**

Here's an example of how the purpose of a particular behaviour is to escape a task.

Anna is reminded to attend the toilet with the rest of the class at set times by her teacher. Lately as the class is getting ready to attend the toilet Anna has been laying on the ground and screaming. Because this behaviour has been disrupting the other children Anna has not been toileted with the rest of the class and instead is calmed down by the teacher and not toileted.

## IN FOCUS

### Case study

John is an eight-year-old boy who has learnt many toileting skills and is happy to attend the toilet at school. He is progressing so well that school have requested that he wear underwear. Unfortunately John's parents are not having the same success at home. John is placed in a pull-up for the one-and-a-half-hour bus trip home and is not keen for it to be removed once he gets home. He is normally tired after a day at school and wishes to either watch his favourite DVD or play with his toys.

John has demonstrated toileting skills, which he uses at school. Possible reasons for John not using the toilet at home could be:

- John may prefer sitting and watching his favourite DVD to attending the toilet.
- John may associate sitting on the toilet with a task he does at school. At home he may demonstrate difficult behaviour to escape from this task.

Toileting at home independently is the alternative behaviour that John's parents wish to encourage. Suggestions to encourage this behaviour could include:

- Provide John with a toileting opportunity before he is allowed to watch his DVD. John would then be rewarded with participating in his preferred activity (DVD) after he has attended the toilet.
- Consider removing pull-ups at both home and school including the bus trip. If the bus driver is concerned about possible accidents, John's parents could consider other protective measures such as a chair pad. This would reduce John's access to the difficult behaviour of passing urine into pull-ups.
- John's parents could discuss with his teacher the current techniques that school is using to encourage the alternative behaviour. It is possible that school may have smaller and lower toilets that may make John's task of attending the toilet more user-friendly. John's parents could purchase a toilet reducer and a step to provide John with better access which would make him feel more secure. School may also be using a particularly successful communication tool that John's parents may wish to implement at home.
- John could be given more toileting opportunities at home and praise given to him for his developing skills.

# Your toileting homework



Provide your child with a toileting opportunity to complete this exercise.

1. Follow the steps outlined in the flowchart ([Module 3 page 27](#)).
2. Identify the purpose of your child's behaviour and go to the appropriate section in the flowchart. For example, you might decide that your child's purpose for wetting pants or nappy is to gain attention (that is, during the change process).
3. If appropriate, select an alternative behaviour that will serve the same purpose as the difficult behaviour. For example, alternative behaviour to having a nappy changed is to attend the toilet with assistance.
4. Work through the flowchart to help you decide what specific strategies to use to manage your child's difficult toileting behaviour. Remember to use planned ignoring and positive consequences rather than time out or other negative consequences. Make sure all relevant people understand your toileting Action Plan.



5. Refer back to the Toileting Skills sheet (Parent Notes Module 1 page 8). Has your child learned more skills.



6. Continue to collect information for your Pants Check sheet (Parent Notes Module 1 page 9).

## IN FOCUS

### Example of flow chart

To get an idea of how to use the flow chart, see the next page. This is an example of where the purpose of the difficult behaviour is to gain attention.

### Example of flow chart when the purpose is to gain attention

