

## Supporting Your Child with Toileting

If your child is struggling with soiling issues there are a number of ways you can help them. It is an extremely common problem for lots of children, but when your child is soiling themselves, sometimes numerous times a day, it can feel as though you are the only ones dealing with this, and it can be made harder to understand when there doesn't seem to be a reason behind it. There are many ways you can help your child, but you must understand that the strategies you put in place need to be continued for the long term. It is very easy once your child has had a couple of bowel movements, to drop the strategies but it is very important to keep working together with your child as they can very quickly start holding their poo again, starting the cycle of soiling themselves over again.

How to help your child

Firstly, establish a regular toilet routine for them.

- Bowel movements can be set off by eating, so after meals encourage your child to have 'toilet time'. Sit them on the toilet for 5-10 minutes. Read them a story, give them a book to read, let them have 10 minutes iPad time..... Whilst they are sitting on the toilet have them put their feet flat on a stepstool, so they are in the best position for a bowel movement. Don't worry if they don't manage to have a bowel movement during toilet time, let them go and play as usual and try again after the next meal time. Even if your child has a bowel movement between these times still give them their toilet time after their next meal.
- If your child does have an accident, don't get cross with them, calmly clean them up, tell them it's ok, accidents happen, let's see if we can try and get to the toilet next time. It can be hard at times to keep a calm approach to the situation, but being supportive

and avoiding punishing them or shouting at them is key. Consider using a reward chart, giving a star for each day without an accident and then a little treat for a certain number of days.

### Diet

- Encourage your child to drink lots of water throughout the day. Pure fruit juice, apple or prune, diluted, is a good way to encourage fluid intake, but limit this as it can be high in sugar.
- Increase the amount of fibre your child eats. Ensure their diet has plenty of fruit and vegetables, whole grain cereals, lentils.....
- Don't remove any food groups from your child's diet without asking their doctor first.

### Physical Activity

- The digestive system is stimulated by physical activity, promoting bowel movements, so encourage regular activity.

### Consult a doctor

If keeping to the toilet time routine and the other strategies aren't helping, you may need to speak with your doctor to check there are no underlying conditions causing the soiling. It may be that from the regular withholding of their stool they have become constipated and are having leakage of soft poo from behind the blockage. They may need stool softeners or laxatives to clear the blockage and to promote regular bowel movements. If these are prescribed, they need to be used under the instruction of the doctor and continued even after your child has a bowel movement – which when the impaction is cleared your child will pass loose, watery stools. You should then reduce the dosage of the stool softener, under the direction of the doctor, to a dose that maintains a regular toileting routine. This could need to be

kept up for a prolonged period of time to ensure your child doesn't revert back to holding their stool.

It's very important to mix any stool softeners correctly. A good video to help with understanding how the softeners work is

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WqxJqLmKao>

A good source of advice is The Children's Bowel and Bladder Charity - Eric:

<https://eric.org.uk/>

### Bedwetting

Bedwetting is a medical condition and doesn't happen due to laziness.

If your child is having problems with bed wetting alongside constipation and soiling problems, it could be that their full bowel is putting pressure on their bladder.

It can also be caused by not drinking enough throughout the day and the bladder therefore not stretching enough to hold their wee at night. So, promoting a good habit of drinking lots of water, especially through the earlier half of the day, is a good way of stretching the bladder in preparation for night-time. Other reasons for bedwetting are that they are producing too much wee at night and they aren't waking when their bladder sends the signal that it's full.

If your child is still struggling with bedwetting after the age of 5 you should contact your GP and ask for your child to be referred to the continence clinic.

There is lots of good advice and support about bedwetting on the 'Eric' website.

Please let us know if your child is struggling with toileting as we will support them, and you, however we can. Also ensure that they have a bag in school with plenty of spare clothes for any changes that are needed.