

# Toileting

Sensory processing differences can be one of many things that contribute to difficulties with toileting. Children may have difficulties processing sensory experiences from within their environment such as noise or smell, and/or difficulties processing the internal sensory messages from their body about whether they need the toilet. Whilst some children may avoid sensory experiences due to fear of getting their hands messy, others may seek these out, resulting in behaviours such as smearing. Toileting challenges can appear as having frequent accidents and/or refusal to use the toilet, avoidance to wiping themselves, or washing their hands for example.

The following ideas are designed to help address these challenges. When using them, consider your child's age, any potential risks and their sensory preferences. Reflect on how to adapt these strategies to best support your child in feeling calm and relaxed during toileting.

Area of difficulty	Strategy	Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments
Child is avoidant of home toilet environment.	Your child may be sensitive to smells in the bathroom. Ensure good ventilation and encourage your child to choose scents of their preference e.g. air fresheners, or hand soaps.	
	Your child may be sensitive to the temperature in the bathroom. Experiment with hotter or cooler environments.	
	Your child may be distracted by external sounds. Consider playing calming music or listening to music of your child's choosing. The music track could help communicate how long the need to sit on the toilet for during toilet training.	
	Limit irrelevant visual distractions in the bathroom e.g. toys, product bottles.	
	Trial helpful visual distractions that may support your child to feel calm when using the toilet such as a device/screen or a book to help your child to sit still.	
	Use of reward charts and motivators may help your child begin to access the toilet.	
Child is unstable on the toilet seat.	The optimum positioning for sitting on the toilet is to have knees higher than hips. Consider the use of a stool underneath the feet support their posture. An example of this could be "the squatty potty".	
	Consider using toilet inserts and/or handles to reduce the size of the seat opening, a standard toilet seat may feel too large, making it seem unstable or intimidating. This adjustment may help make the toilet feel safer and more secure for your child, building their confidence and comfort during toileting.	

	See <a href="#">Worksheet H-Toileting</a> in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Pre-School Resource Pack' on our website, or <a href="#">Worksheet K-Toileting</a> in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack' on our website.	
Child has difficulty recognising and responding to the signals in their body, indicating the need to use the toilet.	Some useful advice can be found at: <a href="#">Interoception and toileting - ERIC</a>	
	Adults can encourage conversation about their own internal sensory cues to normalise these sensations for your child. For example, 'I'm very fidgety because I need a wee', or 'my bladder feels tight because I need a wee'. Other bodily feelings can also be used such as hunger and thirst.	
	If your child is still in nappies, they may have difficulty recognising when they have been to the toilet as the nappy absorbs the moisture. Consider less absorbent options or trial training nappies, or removing the nappy, enabling them to see, hear and feel what happens when they urinate or open their bowels.	
	Use timers to prompt your child to go to the toilet every few hours for example, using apps or visual reminders. Observe your child's actions and movements which may suggest they need the toilet and comment on these to draw their attention to them.	
	If you catch your child in the act of going to the toilet, draw their attention to what is happening to their body and provide lots of praise and encouragement.	
	To help normalise the sensations of needing/going to the toilet, consider ways to teach your child about the internal processes when going the toilet. A useful resource is <a href="#">It's good to go - ERIC</a> (eric.org.uk) (Suitable for children between 4-7years).	
Child has difficulty completing the task in the correct order.	Where possible, block out sights and sounds that they may find distracting.	
	Use visuals to break the task down and remind them of the order of each step. For example, by using a Toileting communication Fan or <a href="#">FREE Toileting Sequence For Autism - Autism Little Learners</a> .	
	Use social stories™ to teach your child the order of tasks in the toileting routine. For further information on social stories™ see: <a href="#">Social Stories - Carol Gray (carolgraysocialstories.com)</a>	
Child has difficulty adjusting zips, buttons etc to	See <a href="#">Worksheet I-Dressing</a> "Child struggles with zips and buttons (p.3-4)" in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack' on our website.	

undress to use the toilet.	See <a href="#">Worksheet G-Dressing Skills</a> under section 'Fastenings' (p.3) in 'Paediatric Occupational Therapy Pre-school Resource Pack' on our website.	
Child refuses or struggles to wipe themselves.	If a child is concerned about the tactile experience of getting their hands messy due to wiping, trial the use of thicker toilet paper or moist toilet wipes. Provide access to hand washing facilities or wipes immediately	
	For children who have difficulty completing personal care due to strong smells, consider if scented toilet paper, sprays or spritzes would be a preferable alternative.	
	Some children may have difficulty coordinating their movements in order to complete personal care.  See <a href="#">Worksheet K-Toileting</a> in 'Occupational Therapy Motor Skills Resource Pack' or <a href="#">Worksheet H-Toileting</a> in 'Occupational Therapy Pre-School Resource Pack' on our website.	
Child is constipated.	Encourage your child to engage in lots of movement (e.g. walking, running, crawling, rolling over soft play shapes).	
	Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids.	
	Encourage your child to engage in stretching different parts of the body. See if they are able to hold each stretch and repeat 2-3 times. A range of stretch based activities can be found online such as cosmic kids yoga.	
	Go to your child's GP if signs and symptoms of constipation cause your child on-going pain and discomfort.	
Child seeks a sensory experience from smearing faeces.	Some useful advice can be found at: <a href="#">Smearing - ERIC</a> This handout outlines the first steps in identifying why your child may be smearing.	
	When supporting your child after they have smeared try to keep a calm and neutral approach. Children can sometimes use smearing as a method to gain adult attention and if they do not receive this it can reduce the incidents of the behaviour.	
	Smearing may stem from a need to 'clean' their hand. Redirecting to hand wipes or hand washes quickly in this instance may prevent smearing.	
	Offer regular toilet trips / nappy checks to reduce opportunity. If there is poo in their pants/nappy demonstrate flushing this down the toilet to reinforce where poo should go.	
	Incorporate regular messy tactile experiences throughout the day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- painting,</li> <li>- water play,</li> <li>- mud kitchen,</li> <li>- slime,</li> <li>- shaving foam or marmite on a tray,</li> <li>- different temperatures such as warm water, warm dough</li> </ul>	

	These could be used as a motivator/reward before or after using the toilet to provide similar sensory feedback if smearing during toileting.	
	If your child smells the poo, offer alternative choices through different scented air freshener or scented toilet rolls. Consider using a scratch and sniff sticker-both sweet and unpleasant smells are available.	
	For younger children, specialist clothing such as unitards can be used to reduce access to their underwear. Unitards can be purchased from specialist online providers.	
	Support your child's understanding of what is expected of them through social stories. For further information on social stories see: <a href="https://www.carolgraysocialstories.com/">Social Stories - Carol Gray - Social Stories (carolgraysocialstories.com)</a>	
Child has difficulty using the public toilet environment.	Radar keys give access to disabled toilets. This means your child would not need to share the toilet space and experience unpredictable noises and smells. You can buy the official N&C Phlexicare key through Disability Rights UK or the Blue Badge Company. If you have an older RADAR key it will be completely silver, but the new keys have a blue heart fob.	
	Prepare for use of public toilets before going on a day trip using social stories™. For further information on social stories™ see: <a href="https://www.carolgraysocialstories.com/">Social Stories - Carol Gray - Social Stories (carolgraysocialstories.com)</a>	
	Reduce over stimulation from unpredictable sensory experiences by: - Using ear defenders to help block out the sound of hand dryers. - Bringing own hygiene wipes. - Bringing own spritz/spray/pulse point roll on to block out smells or place a scent on a hankie - Play own background music. - Bringing toilet seat covers/inserts.	

#### Useful resources:

- Suffolk School Nursing team provide a range of workshops and video's related to toileting needs via Suffolk County Council website: [Workshops - Suffolk County Council](#)
- Range of useful resources: [Peeing, pooing and toileting \(cambspborochildrenshealth.nhs.uk\)](https://cambspborochildrenshealth.nhs.uk/)
- ERIC is the national charity dedicated to improving children's bowel and bladder health  
[Home - ERIC](#)
- Constipation link [Constipation in children - NHS](#)