

Toilet Accidents

How you can help

You & Your Child

As the old saying goes, accidents can happen. And toilet accidents are common among children, even after they have learned to use the toilet.

These accidents don't happen because a child is "bad" or "stupid" or "lazy." Sometimes your child gets interested in something and doesn't stop in time to go to the bathroom. Or he or she may be sick. Or maybe your child is upset about a change in his or her life. Sometimes, he or she cannot feel they need to go to the toilet.

Learning to use the toilet is hard work

To use the toilet and avoid accidents, children have to pay attention to their body signals and control their muscles.

One of the hardest things for them to do is to stop doing something they like so they can go to the bathroom.

Is it any wonder young children sometimes have toilet accidents?

On Back

What you should do when your child has a toilet accident in the daytime.

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How you can help

Praise instead of punish

Your praise means a lot. Children want to use the toilet to win your approval and feel grown up.

- When your child makes it to the bathroom in time, say something like, “I’m proud of you.”
- Help your child see he or she is making progress. Put stars or checkmarks on a calendar for the times when your child goes to the potty on time.

It is hard for children to pay attention to their body signals and get to the bathroom on time. Don’t punish them for something they are learning how to control.

Have your child help clean up after an accident

When your child has to help, he or she will learn it takes work to clean up from an accident.

- Give your child some work to do, like help with changing clothes or changing sheets. You can also have your child wipe the area with a rag.
- Remind your child that when he or she makes it to the toilet, there is no a need to clean up.

Remind your child to go to the bathroom

Accidents sometimes happen when a child is pre-occupied with doing something.

- When you think your child might have to go, ask, “Could you try to go to the potty now?”
- Remind your child that every time he or she has an accident, play stops longer because they have to help clean up.
- Schedule times to go to the potty, such as before going out to play or before a car ride.

Don’t get angry

It’s natural for you to feel angry or frustrated when your child has an accident. But try to be matter-of-fact about it.

Children need to know that accidents are upsetting to their parents. But most children already feel ashamed when they have an accident.

Comfort your child if a change in his or her life may be causing some stress

Children get upset when there are changes in their lives, like a new baby brother or sister, a change in a parent’s work hours, or changes in child care. Stress may cause toilet accidents.

- Find ways to spend some time together every day – rocking, looking at a book, talking about what happened that day, or something else your child likes to do.
- It’s especially important to comfort your child at bedtime.

Accidents will probably stop on their own. Little by little, children adjust.

- Most children have toilet accidents, even after they’ve learned how to use the toilet.
- Try to understand the reason for the accident. If your child is sick, don’t worry about a toilet accident. But if accidents become a habit, you may need to put a discipline program in place.
- Check with your doctor if accidents have been going on for several weeks and you’re worried. The doctor might have some suggestions. And sometimes your child might have an infection or other physical problem that is causing the accidents.

