

Using the Toilet and Bottom Wiping

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Team

Part One: Using the Toilet

Some people may experience anxiety when having to go to the toilet or bathroom. They could be worried about their balance when sitting on the toilet or the motor skills required to perform the task.

Alternatively, they could be scared of sitting on the toilet as it might feel too cold or too hard. The lighting maybe too bright or too dark or the noise and smells may make them feel overwhelmed or they have difficulty in understanding the sensations of when they need to go to the toilet.

Please see below strategies to consider and try:

- Make sure the person is supported with their posture when sitting on the toilet - this will provide more stability and control to be able to go.
- Consider using a foot stool to help increase stability and mark out where the feet need to be placed on it.
- Think about the design of the toilet seat, is the gap too large could you help to reduce anxiety by using a smaller toilet seat.
- Think about the feel of the toilet seat, is it too cold or too warm. Could you try a padded toilet seat? Is the bathroom temperature too cold or too warm, could you adjust the heating?
- To support a feeling of security when sitting on the toilet, consider installing a rail on both sides of the toilet.



- If the person is scared of sitting on the toilet, demonstrate to them by sitting on the toilet and explain there is nothing to worry about.
- Some people can be particularly anxious around using the toilet or even scared of poo.

The following links provide further information from external sources around supporting people to feel comfortable.

[ERIC – supporting people to feel more comfortable around poo](#)

[ERIC – toilet anxiety and toilet phobia in people](#)

Bladder & Bowel UK - <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/The-impact-of-sensory-issues-on-toilet-training-paediatric-Bladder-Bowel-UK.pdf>

[Made for mums blog – 10 of the best potty training books](#)

- If they dislike the feel of toilet paper on their skin, consider using an alternative softer brand, cotton cloth strips or try using wet wipes. Please think about the environment – most wipes aren't flushable – but you could consider biodegradable wipes.
- Does the person find the lighting too bright and overwhelming, consider using a dimmer switch or smart bulbs to alter the lighting? Additionally, consider changing any heavily patterned walls or flooring and think about painting walls with pastel colours or using a plain slip resistant mat to cover up any patterned floors.

- Does the person require additional lighting as they may prefer increased amounts of visual stimulation. Please also be aware that too much visual stimulation could end up being too distracting.
- Sometimes people can find scents in the bathroom overpowering from cleaning products and air fresheners. Try changing these to unscented products. If using a public or shared toilet try and be prepared by bringing a preferred scent on a handkerchief to mask unpleasant smells.
- If the person struggles with noise levels in the bathroom, consider the following:
 - Placing towels on the radiators or place slip resistant mats on the floor to help reduce the noise volume in the room.
 - For younger people trial ear defenders during toileting or for older people try Earbuds or Flare Audio buds to reduce background noise.
 - Encourage the person to put the toilet lid down before flushing as this will reduce the noise level. If need be, allow the person to leave the bathroom and give them a warning you are about to flush the toilet.
- If the person is scared of automatic flushing toilets, please consider placing a sticker or a sticky note over the sensor on the wall.
- If the person is fearful of urine or water splashing them from the toilet bowl, try placing a piece of toilet paper in the toilet bowl before they use the toilet.
- If in the community, you may want to consider using a disabled toilet. Some disabled facilities in the UK need to be accessed via

a specialist key. These keys are referred to as RADAR keys. The following link below provides information on RADAR keys and how to apply for one [RADAR Key Application](#).

- Disabled toilets will often provide you with a quieter environment, increased space, and handrails. If the person is noise sensitive, you may be able to turn the hand dryer off at the fuse switch on the wall to prevent it being accidentally activated.
- Some people can find it confusing to recognise the sensation of when they need to go to the toilet. Being unable to recognise internal body sensations is often referred to as Interoception difficulties. The following link will provide further information on interception and toileting difficulties [Interoception and toileting - ERIC](#).
- When people have difficulty in recognising the sensation required to go to the toilet it is helpful to have an actual picture of the toilet they use at home or school to help connect the sensation and the environment. Please ensure that this toilet picture is included in their visual timetable.
- If the person is struggling to communicate when they feel the sensation of needing to go to toilet, please pay attention to nonverbal cues such as increased fidgeting, wriggling, passing wind or moving away from you which may indicate they need to go to the toilet.
- If the person is struggling to initiate bladder or bowel movements, try blowing games and activities on the potty or toilet this will naturally encourage the stomach to push to help pass urine or motions, e.g., bubble blowing, blowing party whistles, blowing bubbles with a straw into a cup.
- To help increase body awareness when going to the toilet encourage resting hands on the lower tummy and this will help with noticing stomach movements and help to increase

awareness of a full bladder.

Part Two: Bottom wiping

Some people with co-ordination problems have difficulty with bottom wiping and the process of going to the toilet. This can often cause high levels of anxiety for both the person and their caregiver. The following strategies can be used to learn bottom wiping and assist with toileting.

- Encourage a routine of going to the toilet so they don't feel rushed. After a meal there is a gastro-colic reflex that stimulates the bowel, so this may be a good time to try and set up a routine. Encouraging the person to go after breakfast may reduce the anxiety of needing to go at school, college, day center, or work.
- Be aware about the impact of diet on their stools and ability to sense they need the toilet. Avoiding drinking can cause constipation. The fibre in fruit and vegetables makes stools bulkier and softer and easier to pass.
- Support the person to sit in a good position on the toilet. If the person has poor balance, they may benefit from a toilet seat with handles. If the person's feet don't touch the floor, they would benefit from a step (footstool) under their feet to help them maintain their posture.
- Wet wipes are good to use when learning bottom wiping as they wipe more easily and cover a larger surface area.
- It can be helpful to have a discussion with the school or setting if bottom wiping is challenging. This can help them to make alternative arrangements, such as keeping wet wipes in the toilet

for use.

- Getting undressed to use the toilet may be difficult for the person, encourage them to practice the fastening on their own trousers. Try to practice this skill at other times of the day when not using the toilet. Ask your OT for additional strategies if the person struggles with dressing.
- Play games that encourage awareness of where their bottom is and how to reach it. Try encouraging the person to reach for fidget toys or bean bags and put these in the small of their back. Play games where you pass toys or bean bags through your legs from the back to the front.
- Practice bottom wiping by playing the 'target practice' game.
 - Laminate a picture of a target.
 - Place a small amount of chocolate spread/ baby lotion in the centre of the target.
 - Encourage the person to tear off 4 pieces of toilet roll at a time - placing one hand on top of the toilet roll and one hand around the piece they want to pull off.
 - Encourage the person to fold the paper in half and in half again. Try this on the table first and then on your person's leg.
 - Encourage the person to use 'pinchy fingers' to do one pinch of the toilet roll on the target. Use the target as a guide - give the person a score according to how close they can stay to just keeping the chocolate spread on the centre of the target.
 - After one pinch/small wipe encourage the person to look at the paper and hideaway anything they can see by folding the paper

in half.

- Continue until the target is clean/the person needs a new piece of toilet paper.
- Once the person has mastered this independently, without you helping them physically or giving verbal prompts play the same game but hold the target behind the person's bottom.

Bottom wiping is often a difficult and embarrassing topic to talk about.

The purpose of the target practice game is to help to develop the skills necessary for bottom wiping.

Once this game has been mastered, they may need prompting to transfer this skill to bottom wiping. It's important to help the person to practice this skill independently, allow them to try wiping first before helping them.

When practicing it may be helpful to include washing hands within the routine of going to the toilet.

Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



British Sign Language users can use InterpretersLive! a service provided by Sign Solutions. This helps Deaf people to access BSL interpreters, and other communication professionals at any time. More information can be found on our website or by scanning

the QR code to the left.

Other sources of information

NHS 111 NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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