

Sensory Strategies for Potty Training

The ability for the body to make the connection with the brain that it is time to go to the bathroom, requires a properly working connection between the interoceptors in the bladder and bowels and the brain. Interoceptors are similar to proprioceptors and children who under-register proprioception and sensory input overall, tend to have difficulty with interoception as well.

Ideas to Help:

- The most important step is being aware of this, very likely sensory component, and do not force or put pressure on the child with potty training, as it is very possible that the child is truly not able to recognize and identify when they need to go to the bathroom.
- Please do not scold the child as if they have done something wrong when they have an accident or are unsuccessful with potty training.
- Please refrain from "good girl or boy" when they do go to the bathroom, this implies that they are "bad" when they have an accident.
- Working on interoception is really not possible since these are the sensory receptors within the gut and organs...but what you can do is work on the sensory foundation and power sensations which are proprioception, vestibular, and tactile systems. This will help the sensory systems overall and helping the body and brain make the connection.
- Give the child time. Be patient and understanding (<http://asensorylife.com/the-bathroom-and-potty-training-blues.htm>)

General Potty Training Tips:

1. Identify when the child is ready to toilet train. Signs of readiness include interest in visiting the bathroom, interest in observing others use the bathroom, interest in flushing toilet paper down the toilet, reporting to caregiver that they have soiled their diaper, and getting upset when they have soiled their diaper.
2. Set up a routine. Consistently encourage using the toilet at established times.
3. Make toileting easy for toddlers. Dress your child in clothing that is easy for them to remove and put back on. Use elastic waistbands rather than snaps and buttons.
4. Provide a comfortable environment. Keep toilet paper within easy reach and a stool near the toilet. Address different noises your child will hear and explain how a toilet works to calm their fears. You can also include a favorite book and fun smelling soaps and bright colored towels to make hand washing a fun experience for them.
5. Be patient. Children may need to sit for a while. You can run water, sing a song, or look at a book to help relax them. You can also provide a series of pictures in the bathroom of the tasks they need to complete.
6. Encourage positive behavior. Reward and praise your child for their participation. (AOTA)

Sensory Strategies:

- **Get the right seat.** Some children are disturbed by the size and feel of a large toilet seat. Bring your child to the store and help her pick out a potty chair or a cushioned vinyl ring that fits onto an adult toilet seat.

- **Reduce the fear of flushing toilets.** Some children are frightening by the sound of flushing. A sense of control helps: together, count off to the flush, for example: “1, 2, 3, FLUSH!” Make lots of noise as the toilet is flushing, shouting “hooray!”
- **Help them to be aware of the need to “go.”** Sometimes, tight clothes provide sensory input that distracts a child from the sensation of needing to use the potty. Loose clothing such as boxer shorts may help him recognize when he has the urge to go.

Adapted from: www.sensorysmarts.com/practical_solutions.html

Holding Urine or Bowel Movements and Refusing to Use the Bathroom

- Assess the bathroom environment closely. Are there sensory triggers which are keeping the child from feeling safe in the bathroom? Too loud? Strong smells? Toilet seat too cold?
- Limit the use of public restrooms to avoid the unpredictable sensory input. If you must, go in first and bring sticky notes along to place over the sensors of the automatic toilets and dryers.
- Try the use of a portable toilet in a safe place for the child, when in his/her bedroom is great. This will help the nervous system let the guard down to relax enough to go to the bathroom.
- Self-regulation is the key to this overall. A lot of calming and regulating proprioception on a daily basis is very important.

Bathroom Urgency/Frequent Accidents

- It is possible that the child is under-registered to sensory feedback from the bladder and intestines.
- Respect the fact that there may indeed be a sensory explanation. Do not scold or discipline a child who truly may not be having the sensation of needing to go until it is too late.
- Be sure that teachers and caregivers are aware of this.
- Sensory processing and registration must occur in order for this to improve. Providing overall enriched sensory activities throughout the day can help in the long run. Daily frequent doses of proprioceptive input will help promote overall body awareness.
- Try not to place expectations on the child in regards to a certain age in which the child will be fully potty trained. It is not uncommon for children with sensory differences to fully potty train after age 5.
- If the accidents are occurring at night, even more developmental time may be needed, especially for boys. This is not uncommon through at least age 6.

Adapted from: “Understanding Your Child’s Sensory Signals” by Angie Voss, OTR