



## Toilet training resistance: Daytime wetting and soiling

**C**hildren who refuse to be toilet trained either wet themselves, soil themselves, or try to hold back their bowel movements (thus becoming constipated). Many of these children also refuse to sit on the toilet or will use the toilet only if the parent brings up the subject and marches them into the bathroom. Any child who is older than 3 years, healthy, and not toilet trained after several months of trying can be assumed to be resistant to the process rather than undertrained. Consider how capable your child is at delaying a bowel movement (BM) until she (or he) is off the toilet and has had a chance to hide. More practice runs (as you used in toilet training) will not help. Instead, your child now needs full responsibility and some incentives to respark her motivation.

The most common cause of resistance to toilet training is that a child has been reminded or lectured too much. Some children have been forced to sit on the toilet against their will, occasionally for long periods of time. Others have been spanked or punished in other ways for not cooperating. Many parents make these mistakes, especially if they have a strong-willed child.

Most children younger than 5 or 6 years who have daytime wetting or soiling (encopresis) without any other symptoms are simply engaged in a power struggle with their parents. They can be helped with the following suggestions. (If your child holds back BMs and becomes constipated, medicines will also be needed. Ask your doctor for the Guide for Parents on stool holding.)

**Transfer all responsibility to your child.** Your child will decide to use the toilet only after she realizes that she has nothing left to resist. Have one last talk with her about the subject. Tell her that her body makes pee and poop every day and that it belongs to her. Explain that her pee and poop wants to go in the toilet, and her job is to help the pee and poop come out of her body. Tell your child you're sorry you forced her to sit on the toilet or reminded her so much. Tell her from now on she doesn't need any help. Then stop all talk about this subject ("potty talk"). Pretend you're not worried about it. When your child stops receiving attention for nonperformance (not using the toilet), she will eventually decide to perform for attention.

**Stop all reminders about using the toilet.** Let your child decide when she needs to go to the bathroom. Don't remind her to go to the bathroom nor ask if she needs to go. She knows what it feels like when she has to pee or poop and where the bathroom is. Reminders are a form of pressure, and pressure keeps the power struggle going. Stop all practice runs and never make her sit on the toilet against her will because these tactics always increase resistance. Don't accompany your child into the bathroom or stand with her by the potty chair unless she asks you to. She needs to gain the feeling of success that comes from doing it her way.

**Give incentives for using the toilet.** Your main job is to find the right incentive. Special incentives, such as favorite sweets or video time, can be invaluable. When encouraging your child to use the toilet for BMs, initially err on the side of giving too much (several food treats