

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Barnsley Children's Therapy Services

Advice and Strategies on Soiling

Name:

NHS Number:

Children usually achieve bowel control between the ages of 3 and 4 years old. Children soil when they poo in their pants, on the floor or in other inappropriate places. It is not an uncommon problem, affecting around 1 in 50 children between the ages of 8-10 years old, it can be very distressing for children and families.

Soiling or what's also known as encopresis can be divided into two categories:

Primary: children who have continually soiled as they have not learnt to poo on the toilet, this may be due to a physical or learning difficulty.

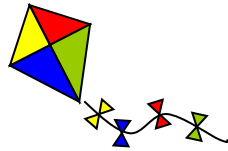
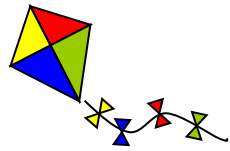
Secondary: approximately half of children who soil have previously achieved bowel control then lose it a year or so later.

There are lots of reasons why children soil. It is important to try and understand the reasons why in order to help them:

- Not learning a regular toilet routine is a common cause of soiling. The child may be reluctant to use the toilet. This may sometimes be part of a general pattern of behaviour, where a child refuses to do what you want them to
- Fear and anxiety around using the toilet
- Restricted or poor diet
- Stressful life events and experiences e.g. moving house, starting nursery or school
- Difficulty with motor skills and bottom wiping (see additional advice sheet on bottom wiping)
- They may have had a painful experience going to the toilet which could result in the child not using the toilet and then withholding their poo, which can then lead to constipation and overflow incontinence

If a child doesn't act on their body's signal that they need to do a poo, maybe because they've experienced a painful poo in the past, poo can build up in the large bowel. The longer the poo stays there, the more water is absorbed and the harder and bigger the poo gets.

If the poo stays in the rectum, the rectum stays stretched, and the message is no longer sent to the brain. So your child might have no idea that they need to do a poo.



More liquid poo from higher up the bowel can leak around the hard lumps of poo and might even leak out of the child's bottom – this is called **soiling** or **overflow**. This poo might be runny, so you might think your child has diarrhoea, or it might be hard little bits, or both. Your child may not realise this is happening and it is not something they can control.

Things you can try to help:

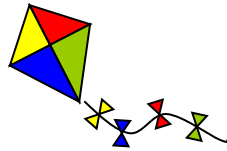
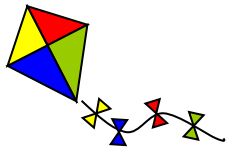
- Set up a regular toilet routine for your child, they could sit on the toilet for 5-10 minutes everyday after breakfast (about 20 minutes after breakfast is a really good time to try) and again after their evening meal.
- Be positive and encouraging – you could use a reward chart for your child sitting on the toilet (whether or not they do a poo) or leave some toys or books next to the toilet
- Encourage your child to go to the toilet as soon as they have the urge to go
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids (6-8 glasses) to keep poo soft and to eat a balanced diet
- Encourage your child to be physically active (exercise helps to keep poo moving)
- We use the same muscles for blowing as we do for pooing so try playing games whilst on the toilet e.g. blowing into a balloon or a musical instrument

It is important to consult your GP or Paediatrician if you have concerns that your child may be constipated or is finding it painful to pass poo.

Having a regular toileting routine can be challenging for children with sensory processing difficulties.

Children may avoid using the toilet due to being **hypersensitive**:

- **Smell** - may dislike the smell of their own poo or the smell of a public toilet
 - Trial using a handkerchief or scarf with a favoured smell on to mask the smell of the toilet/poo
 - Use a favoured scented lip balm
- **Noise** – may dislike hand driers or the sound of the toilet flushing
 - Trial using ear defenders or headphones with preferred music/sounds playing
 - Flush the toilet after your child has left the room or allow them to do it so they are in control
 - Switch hand driers off where possible. You could also try using a graded approach to noise exposure, playing a clip of a hand drier or a flushing toilet on Youtube at a low level and allowing your child to increase/decrease the volume



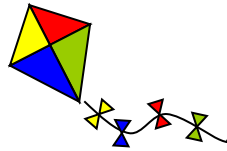
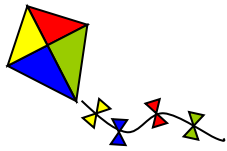
- **Touch** - may dislike how the toilet seat feels or are worried they may come into contact with poo when wiping their bottom
 - Warm the toilet seat prior to using or place fabric/toilet roll on the seat for your child to sit on
 - Ensure your child is sat comfortably on an appropriate sized toilet seat with their feet supported to reduce the fear of falling (a fitted toilet trainer seat may help)
 - Work on folding and manipulating the toilet paper and practising bottom wiping
 - Teach hand washing and have wipes and a nail brush close by to wipe/wash hands
 - Allow your child to have access to gloves to wear when bottom wiping if needed

Children may be **hyposensitive**:

- **Interoception**: may not be aware their bowel or bladder is full and understand how to use the muscles to push
 - Try to encourage a regular toileting routine
 - Practise pushing whilst sat on the toilet using blowing games
- **Smell**: children who regularly soil can become accustomed to the smell and may not be aware that they have soiled themselves
 - Play smell identification games and incorporate strong, pungent aromas to match the item to the smell
 - Talk about what you can smell
 - Encourage your child to participate in cooking, baking and food preparation to increase smell awareness
- **Touch**: may not be aware of the feel of the poo if they have soiled themselves
 - Increase contrast and variety of textures in every day tasks and games. Use different weight, size and texture.
 - Fine motor activities: provide lots of opportunity to explore through touch
 - Encourage 'messy' play
 - Use massage and deep pressure

Children may be **seeking**:

- **Smell**: may like strong, pungent aromas, can be pleasurable to those 'seeking' or those that need a lot of sensory information to 'register' smell
 - Replace the sensory need (seeking smell) with a more appropriate one
 - Provide similar aromas (pungent, acrid) such as marmite, vinegar, coffee grounds
 - Facilitate play with these smells 'every day'



- **Touch:** may like soft, smooth, squelchy... often a pleasant sensation if you don't associate poo with 'dirty'
 - Replace the sensory need (often touch seeking) with a more appropriate one
 - Provide similar textures (gloop, play dough, chocolate mousse etc.) to play with/ explore
 - Try bath jellies to replicate the sensation of sitting in poo
 - Do this regularly 'every day' where possible to reduce the need to gain the experience themselves

Useful links and resources

ERIC The Children's Bowel and Bladder Charity have lots of useful links and resources available for children, parents and schools.

www.eric.org.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/soiling-child-pooing-their-pants>

Stool Withholding: What to do when your child won't poo by Sophia Ferguson

Inspired by her experience of this issue with her own son

A boy like you: A story for boys who soil

A girl like you: A story for girls who soil

Written by James Parkin, who had soiling problems as a child until he was 11. This story has been specially written for boys and girls aged from 6 to 12 years who have problems using the toilet and soil their underwear.

**Contact Childrens Therapy if further advice or information is required
01226 644396**