



**Toileting:
Help, I
think my
child is
regressing!**



So, you have started toilet training and it seemed your child was making progress, your child was having some success using the potty/toilet and only having a few accidents, when suddenly, they seem to be having accidents on a daily basis. This is something that Occupational Therapists frequently get asked about.

Firstly, it is important to consider some of the reasons your child may be regressing with toileting, if we are able to identify the 'why' then we are able to work on getting them back on track to achieving maximum independence.

Common reasons a child may regress with their toileting include:

- The rewards being used are not motivating enough or may no longer motivate your child.
- The rewards used during toilet training may have been removed/reduced too early.
- When your child has an accident, they are receiving a lot of attention. They may be repeating this in order to gain attention (whether the attention is positive or negative).
- Changes in regular routines or in the environment. Change can be unsettling for children, changes to regular routines such as starting school, moving house, introducing a new baby or transitioning from using a potty to using the toilet.
- Illness or infection can result in regression in toileting, particularly UTI's, as painful urination may become associated with toileting.
- Constipation can also result in regression, as painful bowel movements may become associated with toileting.
- Having a 'bad' experience in the toilet may cause children to become fearful of using the toilet.
- Sensory difficulties can also cause regression. Some children may have a lot of success with voiding their bladder and then may have a successful bowel movement in the toilet and might regress due to sensory sensitivities. Other times transitioning from a potty to the toilet can be difficult, as children may be sensitive to noises such as extractor fans or the toilet flushing.
- Changes to diet or medication.



Getting back on track - moving from regression to progression

Toilet training can be frustrating and time consuming for all involved, however it is important that as caregivers we remain calm at all times. Showing frustration can cause increased anxiety around toileting and may cause further regression.

If your child has an accident it is important to remain calm and identify what has happened (i.e. 'you've done a wee/poo, let's get changed'). Try not to give additional attention to the fact that they have had an accident, by keeping conversation to a minimum (without causing distress or making the child feel that they have done something wrong). It is always a good idea to use the bathroom as a place to change after an accident, as it will help build associations between toileting and the bathroom.

Accidents may also occur more frequently when your child is engaged in play or a highly motivating activity, because play is too enjoyable to stop and go to the toilet. Taking your child to the toilet before a situation where you know they will be engaging in a motivating activity for an extended period of time may reduce the instances of having an accident.

Consult with your doctor if you think your child may be unwell or that they may have an infection or constipation. Trust your instincts as a caregiver, as you know your child best and are best placed to identify any changes in toileting habits/signs of pain and discomfort.

If you have identified that there has been a change in your child's routine or environment that may be contributing to regression in toilet training, slowing down the progression and reducing expectations may be helpful. Sometimes it may be required to first re-establish a routine and then re-start toilet training.

It is always helpful to take a step back and look at what skills your child had mastered before they regressed, re-starting toilet training from a point where your child is sure to have success and a positive experience will assist with getting them back on track.



It is also always important to ensure that whatever reward you are using (i.e. praise, stickers, food) continues to be highly motivating for your child. If they are not motivated by the reward offered, then they are less likely to have success. Rewards should always be given immediately after successful toileting to avoid confusion. If you think your child is close to mastering toileting, it is important that rather than completely stopping rewards, it may be more useful to gradually reduce them.

There are times where you will just need to go back to the basics! This may be going back to keeping a log/recording your child's toileting habits to see if there are any changes and identifying any regularities. This can help you to establish a timed-toileting program.

Record keeping can also be extremely helpful. It is so easy to focus on the accident itself and the frustrations around toilet training. Taking note of the number of accidents your child is having per day, may be a useful way to monitor progress and celebrate the small wins!

The most important thing to remember is that although toilet training can be frustrating and difficult, if you access the right supports and are consistent with the strategies you are implementing, you will get there.

