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Title: Potty training - Russian style (long)

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The whole purpose of early training is to show the child WHERE to do it, rather than to give him a responsibility of making a decision TO DO OR NOT TO DO, like it is done here in the States. Both systems do work and both have their pluses and minuses. In this post I will be talking about healthy adjusted children, who are at least able to crawl and about lucky families, who are able to provide conditions for such training.

This is the same talk that I give in my office to FAMILIES, who are ready to start toilet training - when their children are six months or older. I repeat FAMILIES, and not children, because timing of toilet training is mostly a cultural decision. Actually, average age of toilet training in the Scandinavia is...11 months.

Control of defecation and urination is the same body function as eating, sleeping, walking and talking. Eventually, everybody learns to do it. And the same, like with eating, sleeping and talking some orphanages do it as close as possible to home conditions, while others do it in the ugliest way possible. This is how it is recommended to be done AT HOME.

First of all, control of defecation and urination is at the same level of the spinal cord as lower leg control. Therefore, if some adult, God forbid, loses control of his/her lower extremities because of the spinal cord injury, guess what is most probably lost too? When we house-brake (toilet training) a dog, do we asking him to bark "I want to defecate!?" Admit it - we are animals - talking, driving, computer using, animals.

Toddlers and young children have some very powerful ways to control adults. The major three are behaviour (temper tantrums), feeding (picky toddlers) and toilet training. The same way children can refuse to eat just to make mom upset and to get cookies instead of carrots (usually not a problem for an adopted child) or refuse to behave in public or a home or both, they can manipulate with toilet training too. Very often during "late" toilet training children can refuse to use the toilet and will "hold" urine and/or stool until placed in the diaper again or until becoming clinically constipated. We can call it "diaper training" - child is conditioned on a diaper. Either unconsciously or as a power struggle such children refuse to accept the way adults want them to behave.

So, anatomically and physiologically children are ready to begin toilet training at the time they start crawling and are ready to be successfully trained by the time

they are steadily walking. The whole point in early toilet training is to show the child WHERE to do it. The good thing about early training is that small children do not show as much negativism as toddlers and the probability of a power struggle is much smaller. Infants and young toddlers want to please you and do not mind trying new things. If your child resists sitting on the potty - don't fight, don't push - she wants to do it the American way, let her do it, - this is a free country!

As long as your child is able to sit unassisted, you can create a routine of putting your baby on a potty for 2-5 min (note the time!) - as long as your baby agrees to sit there with a diaper off. When to do it? At least 6-8 times a day - after waking up in the morning and after naps, after each meal, before sleep, before leaving the house and when the stretch between visits to the bathroom are longer than 2 hours. Always go to the bathroom before leaving any place - home, hotel, restaurant, clinic, airplane etc. (That is a good tip for adults too). Having loose stools actually helps with toilet training - every time you put your baby on the potty they will have higher probability of success! Praise your baby for succeeding and do not notice failures. You can continue to use diapers or you can use underwear.

The purpose of diapers is your convenience. Use them when you have to go out, when you don't want to mess your furniture, but keep changing those diapers as frequently as possible - do not let your child to be in a wet or dirty diaper for too long. Modern diapers can hold tons of urine and some parents are cheating on diaper changes in older infants in order to keep amount of used diapers down - they can be costly! Let your child to get used to the clean and dry diaper only. Pull-ups are just expensive diapers, and, unless your day care requires them - your child does not need pull-ups. For training sake use the cheapest, the least absorbent diapers, so your child will feel wetness immediately. For added effect you can put a piece of soft paper towel or gauze in the diaper - so it would be not as absorbent. For a child with the frequent loose stools diapers are more appropriate than underwear. When travelling, for security sake, use highly absorbent diapers, but keep changing them frequently.

Underwear is recommended when your child has formed stools, is walking steadily, is using potty without hesitation and you are able to provide easy access to the potty at any moment. In a child, who is not completely toilet-trained underwear can be used in controlled setting, when a little accident would not create a big problem. For example, when you will have to spend some time in the kitchen cooking or during summer, when you can let your child to "fertilize" your lawn. The first purpose of underwear is to show your child the uncomfortable feeling of the accident. That is exactly why walking around naked is not usually working - they have to get wet, dirty and uncomfortable. Change your child as soon as accident happened. The second purpose is to show the achievement - "I am a big boy/girl now!" Older children will be interested in the same underwear as parents - plain white sets bought at the same time for "Daddy and me" or "Mommy and me" can do wonders in 2-3 year olds, who definitely want to be like Mommy and Daddy or like older siblings.

NEVER ask your child - "Do you want to go potty?" Believe me, the answer most of the time will be big time NO! - those kids have more important things to do. Be assertive - IT IS TIME TO GO POTTY. But, if your child is asking to do it - respond immediately, even if you suspect that she is faking.

Early toilet training in boys can be a little bit tricky - it is better for small boys to urinate in a sitting position until they are completely trained. This way they would not have to separate urge for defecation and urination until they are mature enough to do it.

Usually with the early toilet-training children are achieving bowel control first and bladder control second, as opposed to the "late" training, when initially comes bladder control.

What to use - toilet or potty? For early toilet training potty is more appropriate. In any way, child has to sit with his feet firmly on the floor, enabling him to push. Those pictures with children sitting on the toilet seat with their legs swinging in the air are very misleading. Just imagine yourself trying to push using a toilet seat, which is as high as an exam table in the doctor's office. Potties also can be convenient if you don't have easy access to the bathroom. Most of 3-4 year olds (depending on the height) can easily use a regular toilet seat with or without a footstool to help with pushing.

Please remember that in the "early" toilet training if your child succeeds - it is his victory, but if an accident happens - it is not his fault.