A Child's View of Toilet Training

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Although parents often think of their own challenges when they toilet train their children, what a child goes through during the learning process is even more daunting.

Understanding his perspective on toilet training will help you clarify your role as teacher and help your child reach success.

Life is Unfair

As he sees it, your child is being required to give up a part of himself when he goes to the bathroom in the toilet; it's something he has made, and he has to put it in an arbitrary and often inconvenient place. Using the bathroom means he has to interrupt the best part of his day, playing, for a disruptive and time-consuming activity. If his stools are hard- or if they have been in the past- the process may even be painful and uncomfortable.

Toilet Terrors

Then your child has to deal with the indignity – and even terror – of having his precious production flushed away, never to be seen again. The other things he makes are proudly displayed on the refrigerator. Why does this one have such a different destiny? This process raises some scary questions: Could the rest of him suffer the same fate? If he falls in, will the swirling noisy waters suck him down, too, never to be heard from again? Just where does it go, anyway? What's beyond the toilet bowl? Is there a monster down there, ready to grab his bottom at any second? (This last belief is nearly universal among children with older siblings, who are all too often happy to terrify their unsuspecting younger brothers and sisters.)

The Bottom Line

After he has successfully produced, he's forced to wipe his bottom (yuck!), and then wash his hands, a task very few children really enjoy. Then he has to struggle to pull his pants up correctly – without the elastic twisting and with one foot in each leg hole. It only gets worse if his trousers have snaps, a zipper, or buttons. (In their haste to get the job done and back to playing, most little boys quickly learn that pulling up a zipper can be a very risky proposition.)

If he has slightly wet or stained his underwear because he made a timing error, he has to either put it back on and hope the grownups don't notice or face the music. If they do notice, that means he's admitting partial failure, as well as letting himself in for looks of disappointment on the faces of those to whom this means so much.

He wants to please mom and dad, and he wonders if they'll still love him if he can't get this bothersome task just right. It was so easy to just have the diapers take care of it. Why all this worry and trouble now when life was so simple before?

All these things to remember, risk, and take time for – all simply to please those he cares about most. To him, it all seems so strange, complicated, scary, and full of chances to mess up. Putting it all together really is a tremendous accomplishment on his part. No wonder he'll feel so great when he masters toilet training! Appreciate what he has done to please you and, ultimately, to feel good about himself.