

# Family Education Sheet

## A Parent's Guide to Healthy Bladder Habits for Children with Urinary and Bowel Conditions



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Many parents and caregivers feel worried and frustrated when their child has urinary or bowel issues. This family education sheet offers tips to help your child learn healthy bladder habits. Please know that these are just meant to be suggestions.

- Every family is unique and not every idea may apply to you.
- Improving healthy bladder habits can be frustrating for children and their families. These feelings are completely normal.
- It's hard for children to improve these habits.
- It's important to keep this process as positive and rewarding as possible.

### Set clear, realistic goals

When starting to toilet train or improve your child's bladder habits, it's important to set clear goals that take into account how they void (use the toilet or catheterize).

Goals should be specific for your child. For example, a goal may be for them to change their pad or pull-up when it's wet or use the toilet every 2-3 hours. Other children might be learning to catheterize on their own.

**Start small.** Children have the best chance for success when they have a clear understanding of expectations and when the expectations are do-able.

Skills learned by reaching small goals will help them reach larger goals. We suggest discussing appropriate goals with your child's Urology healthcare team.



### Use healthy coping skills

The process of improving healthy bladder habits can be frustrating for children and their families. These feelings are completely normal. It's important to use coping skills to manage your own emotions, especially when interacting with your child.

- Kids often imitate their family's emotions. If you appear upset and frustrated, your child will likely feel that way too. If you appear calm, patient and supportive, your child will feel comforted.
- Even if your child acts if they don't care, they're probably feeling frustrated or embarrassed.
- If you argue with your child about their symptoms or lack of progress, it can cause stress and strain your relationship. Set aside time for positive interactions to help them feel supported.
- Take a few deep breaths or spend some time alone to cope with frustration.
- Some parents find that taking time to do an activity that's enjoyable and relaxing can help.
- Some parents share their worries with a friend or health professional.

### Remember that change is slow

It will take time for your child to develop new habits. It's very common to experience setbacks.

- It's hard for children to improve their bladder habits. It's important to keep this process as positive and rewarding as possible.
- Punishment can increase your child's worry and guilt about their symptoms and can make it harder for them to make changes.
- Some families focus on weekly or monthly progress rather than daily progress. This can help to help keep things in perspective.
- Your child may need reminders to use the bathroom if they're following a schedule. Other children may need help with catheterization.

### Stay positive

Focus on the successes and stay positive. It's important to help your child build confidence and self-esteem related to their bladder habits.

- On hard days, it can be helpful to find 1 positive change your child has made. For example, "I know you're frustrated that you had an accident this morning, but I'm so proud of you for changing your pad/pull-up when it was wet."
- Remind your child of past successes. This helps them focus on the progress they're making, rather than moments of frustration or struggles.

- Listen to your child's ideas about what will be helpful for them. Encourage them to keep doing things they enjoy as much as possible.

## Acknowledge effort and success

Reward your child for the steps they achieve. For some children, simple praise can be very motivating and rewarding. Acknowledging your child's effort can help them stay hopeful and positive even when they're struggling.

- If you choose to use a reward system, remember that goals should be challenging but within reach. Rewards should be motivating. Younger children should have rewards right away. Older children and teenagers sometimes like having rewards they can add up to earn a larger reward.
- Rewards shouldn't cost money. They can be spending time with their parents or friends.
  - Consider including special rewards or fun activities in your behavior plan for when your child reaches important milestones. For example, following their voiding schedule for 3 days in a row, changing their pad when wet or practicing a new skill, like self-catheterizing.
  - If your reward system isn't working, consider asking someone on the Urology team for help.

## Know who is on your team

Your Urology healthcare team may include your child, your family and your healthcare team, which includes nurses, advanced practice clinicians, physicians, social workers, a child life specialist, a psychologist and scheduling staff.

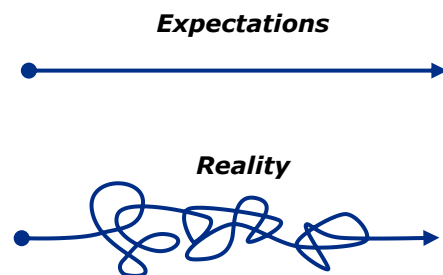
- School providers are able to help support your child at school. For example, they can help to create a 504 plan that can give your child helpful support in the classroom. Supports may include allowing your child to keep medical supplies at the nurse's office or excusing absences when your child is in the hospital or visiting the doctor.

## Ask for help

We encourage you to speak honestly with your healthcare team if you're having trouble adding recommendations into your daily life or feel that the current treatment plan isn't working. The healthcare team is available to help develop a plan that works best for your specific needs.

### Don't forget!

Change takes time. Following the recommendations of your team is the best chance to success, but we understand that change isn't easy. Be patient, stay positive and let us know when we can help.



*This Family Education Sheet is available in Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese.*