

Letting Down The Pressure

A parent's daily life is full of responsibilities. As children get older, parents “give” parts of those responsibilities to their children. The goal is for the child to take over tasks from you, such as noticing that they need to go, getting clothes off and on, or wiping and handwashing. Sometimes, this handoff goes smoothly. Other times, your child might refuse to do something you've asked them to do; even things you know they *can* do. This can cause conflict: when you expect your child to complete task that they can't – or won't – complete.

If your child is struggling with continence, using the toilet and taking over bathroom tasks might be scary or stressful. When people feel scared or stressed, they might shut down, or act out.

Parents might not understand why it's so hard for their child to do these simple things. You might even see them doing the same skills at other times. The stress your child feels is usually not from any task or skill but from feeling pressure, expectations, or fear that they won't be successful. Forcing, punishing, or yelling usually won't help decrease your child's overwhelm (we've all tried!)

BUT by building trust and defining responsibility clearly, you can work your child to build toileting independence.

Letting down the pressure means making choices that decrease unproductive or unnecessary stress and conflict with your child about toileting and continence. Parents let down the pressure by making clear choices about who is responsible for different tasks and decisions. This is called the **division of responsibility** (DoR). DoR was created to help parents at mealtime. It can apply to lots of activities in your day with your child, including toileting. A clear DoR makes expectations clear, so it's easier to increase your child's independence later.

When we use the Division of Responsibility, we clarify...

My child is
responsible for...
child takes on

I am responsible
for...
parent takes on

Someone else is
responsible for...
delegate to another person

For now, we will let
go of...
put these aside

Use the Continence Participation Inchstones Handout

Describe how you and your child meet the needs below. Circle the ones that describe your child. Mark any areas that are problems, or don't have a working DoR.

...Getting clean (wiped, hands washed) when they pee and poop

...Taking clothing on and off when they pee and poop

...Taking medication or other treatment related to pee and poop

...Deciding when and where to change, get clean, use the toilet, etc.?

Ask yourself...

- What tasks are **difficult** or **upsetting** for my child right now? Could I take on, delegate, or let go for a while?
- What tasks does my child do **well** and **willingly** right now? Am I encouraging my child take responsibility for these tasks?

Define your Division of Responsibility & Team Up with your Child

Decide what your child, you, and other people will take on, and decide what you'll let go of (for now!).

Tell your child what changes they can expect: "I know that we've asked you to sit on the toilet after every meal. We realized that was causing you a lot of stress, so we're going to take a break from that.

How does that sound?"

An Example: Your child is in diapers. She willingly takes her clothes on and off, but she melts down when asked to clean her skin/wipe during changes. She is scared of the echoey bathroom and the cold toilet. She wants to change in the hallway, and cries if someone makes her sit on the toilet.

My child is responsible for...	I am responsible for...	Someone else is responsible for...	For now, we will let go of...
Stepping in and out of her pants and pull-up Getting a clean pull-up and a plastic bag for the wet pull-up from the bathroom Holding open the bag while I drop the wet pull-up in the bag	Giving my child a two minute warning before diaper changes Staying calm while I help my child get clean Wiping her skin Holding clean pullup while she steps into it Throwing away the wet pull-up	Our occupational therapist will practice wiping activities Our occupational therapist will help us adapt our bathroom so it is less echoey.	Changing in the bathroom Sitting on the toilet