

Put on Your Oxygen Mask First: Coping During Toilet Training

Toilet training (TT) brings added effort, time, and mess... and (unfortunately!) no guaranteed results.

*Research shows that toilet training can be **one of the most stressful times in parenthood**. This stress puts parents/caregivers at risk for overwhelming negative emotions.*

Whether you are preparing to introduce the potty to a toddler, or managing longstanding incontinence, you will need skills to deal with negative emotions in a healthy way. This is called **distress tolerance**.

Having the ability to tolerate distress is important because raising a child is hard! Your child will probably do (or not do!) things that will likely cause you distress. When you can respond with calm and skill, Your child(ren) will see you using these skills and learn them, too!

How to develop distress tolerance

Be Aware. Observe your thoughts, feelings, and body without judging. This way we react with thought, not just in the heat of the moment.

Example: “My child just pooped in his pull-up. I think he should be using the toilet at his age. I feel embarrassed this happened in front of other parents, which leads to my body feeling tense.”

Accept. When difficult emotions arise, we can manage them without exploding or shutting down. We don’t need to do anything to change the feeling; we can just ride the wave. This wave will pass.

Example: “It is ok that I feel this way. It makes sense given how hard we’ve been working on continence.”

Alter. Sometimes, the thoughts we have can make our emotions bigger than they need to be. Pay attention to your thoughts and try to shift them to be more helpful.

Example: “Just because other children his age are using the toilet doesn’t mean he should be. Nobody that I value is judging me as a parent.”

Adapt. We can do things to help us cope with challenging emotions. **It’s ok to do something that feels good to help you feel better.**

Examples: many coping strategies help to distract or soothe us when emotions overcome us. See some ideas on the back of this sheet.

Common thoughts and feelings I have about my child's continence:

How can I accept the challenges I am experiencing:

How can I shift my thoughts from unhelpful emotionally to helpful:

Coping tools I can use:

Bake or cook	Stretch or dance	Sip tea, water
Read	Slow breathing	Have a snack
Listen to music	Cuddle a pet	Write or draw
Call a friend	Get fresh air	Take a bath