Toilet Training Toilet training can be a real challenge to children who have sensory differences. Successful toileting requires being able to receive and interpret the sensory information~~,~~ that signals a full bladder or the need to have a bowel movement. The child must then form the motor plan to get to the bathroom and be able to tolerate or manage the sensory challenges of the bathroom such as fluorescent lights or the loud flush of the toilet.

Toilet training is one of the tasks of childhood that can reflect stress, and a child can exercise a great deal of control by controlling toileting. Therefore, try not to enter a battle of wills on the issue as toilet training tends to run much smoother without stress and expectation. If you experience set-backs with your child, know that this is absolutely normal. Take the pressure off and go back to it after some time has passed. The bowel and bladder are smooth muscles, and the sensory signals they send up to the brain to indicate a full bladder or bowel are subtle and initially more difficult for children to interpret, especially if they are busy and distracted.

Sensory Strategies

* If your child does not seem to be aware of when they empty their bladder let them go naked – they will see when they urinate and connect the sensation with the consequence.
* If your child wears nappies, draw attention to information from other senses, such as smell and added weight of a wet nappy (cloth nappies give more sensory feedback than disposable nappies).
* Disposable nappies are designed to “lock” the wetness away, making it harder for your child to feel when it is wet. Try putting a pair of pants on them, underneath the nappy, to increase the sensation of wetness.
* If your child is sensitive to toilet paper, try wet wipes or a wet flannel.
* If your child cannot tolerate sitting on the toilet, try to make it as safe as possible:
  + Make the hole smaller with an infant toilet seat.
  + Put a step/foot support under your child’s feet.
  + Have a handrail for your child to hold onto.
  + Try having your child wear a weighted vest to encourage sitting for a longer period of time.
  + Try using distractions if they find it difficult to sit on the toilet for any length of time such as singing a favourite song or reading a book.
  + If the light in the toilet/bathroom is too bright, turn off the lights or close the blinds.
  + If the bathroom/toilet is too noisy, use ear defenders or noise cancelling ear plugs.

Look at the advice sheet on Toileting and the section on Planning Wheels on the Occupational Therapy web site for more ideas: [www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/BedsandLutonOT](http://www.cambscommunityservices.nhs.uk/BedsandLutonOT)

Useful general web sites include.

ERIC: <https://www.eric.org.uk/>

Bladder and Bowel UK: <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/>