



# Sesame Family Newsletter

May 24, 2006

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



## For Parents

### [Saying Goodbye to Diapers](#)

*by Jordan Brown*

Toilet training can sometimes take years.

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### Games And More: **Happy Birthday, Oscar!**

Celebrate Oscar's birthday (June 1) with some grouchy games!

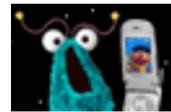
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### From the Workshop



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## Saying Goodbye to Diapers

## IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER

Two years ago, when my son Finn was almost 3, I wrote a Sesame Family Newsletter entitled **THE POTTY CHRONICLES** (see link at right). In it, I described the struggles and successes of teaching a toddler how to use the toilet. I also shared some of the handy tips I learned from other parents. One of the most valuable bits of wisdom was: "Don't rush the process. Every child learns at a different pace." A neighbor reassured me, "Gently encourage him, but don't push. When he's ready, he'll pick it up quickly." In my 2004 newsletter, I noted the excellent progress Finn was making ("He stands! He pees!"), but even then I suspected we had "months to go" before our son was diaper-free.

Boy, was my estimate off! Finn is now almost 5 and a half, and still insists on wearing pull-up diapers at night, and at least part of the day. Most of the time, he wears regular underpants, and happily stands in front of the toilet to pee. Going poop is another matter. (Before I delve into the specifics, a quick aside to the grown-up version of Finn, in case he reads this newsletter in the future. "I hope you're not embarrassed that I shared the intimate details of your potty training with thousands of random parents. Be assured that many moms and dads will benefit from our experience.")

Anyway, back to Finn and pooping. Even though he has "gone" while sitting on the toilet, this is not his usual modus operandi. No, these days, when he feels the urge at home, he disappears into his room, pulls down his underpants, meticulously puts on a pull-up diaper himself, and then pulls his underpants over it. Then he finds a place in the apartment where he can "be alone," as he puts it. About five minutes later, Finn will emerge from his hiding place, and ask my wife Ellen or me, "Please change me. I have poop." We then go to the bathroom, where he removes his underpants and the pull-up, and we pour its contents in the potty. "This is where it should go," we remind Finn, then flush, and clean him up. Much as we gently cajole, Finn resists wiping himself. He then pulls up his underpants and pants, washes his hands, and returns to whatever he was doing.

Believe it or not, this ritual is progress. Six months ago, the pull-up diaper wasn't part of the process. Whenever he felt the need to poop, he usually just did so in his underpants, sometimes not telling anyone. For a while, this happened almost daily in preschool. His teachers never made a big deal about it, but helped him change into spare clothes, and discreetly mentioned it to me at pick-up time. His teachers fortunately responded to Finn's embarrassment by



**THE POTTY CHRONICLES**  
[A father gets the poop on toilet training.](#)

**TOILET TRAINING**  
[Don't stress out if your child is a slow toilet trainee.](#)

**THE P WORD**  
[It's potty time!](#)

reassuring him that everyone has "accidents" from time to time. The only time his teachers mentioned the subject was in the context of a group discussion about the procedure for telling the teacher when they have to go to the bathroom.

While many children are out of diapers by the time they are 3 or 4, I was relieved to learn recently that our situation isn't unique. Other parents of 5 year olds sometimes grapple with how to help their kids say goodbye to diapers.

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## WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON?

**A few weeks ago, with kindergarten on the horizon, Ellen and I decided to ramp up our potty-training efforts.** We know that too much pressure can backfire, but we wanted to err on the side of trying rather than just sitting back and hoping things would resolve themselves.

Our first step was to think about what might be going on in Finn's head. Why was our boy still clinging onto diapers? When we've asked Finn about the subject, he's evasive. Perhaps even he is not entirely sure. We suspect there are a number of factors at play. First, we've read that many preschoolers have control issues. Adults make so many of the decisions in their lives, that children sometimes feel that by resisting potty training, they are saying, "I'm in charge here, not you!" A second factor is the "grossness" issue. In general, Finn can be squeamish. However, it's a bit puzzling that the same kid who gleefully shows you a piece of old gum he found on the sidewalk feels scared of wiping himself. On many occasions, I've allowed him to watch me go through the process of using the toilet, so he can see the steps involved, and realize that it's not a big deal.

A third variable is pain. One way Finn deals with the whole pooping-on-the-potty issue is to NOT deal with it. He sometimes keeps it inside, which can lead to constipation. Eventually, when nature takes its course, the experience of emptying his bowels is painful.

Finally, Ellen and I wonder if Finn still clings to diapers because, at some level, he wants to remain a baby. Using kid logic, perhaps he thinks, "If I never learn to use the potty, part of me can stay a baby." When Finn sees all the attention lavished on his little sister, now 18-months old, it makes sense that he might think that by wearing diapers sometimes, he's still "in the club."

Add to all this that Finn is strong-willed, preferring to do things his way. He didn't start talking until he was about 2



### BED-WETTING

Our 6 year old has a small bladder which results in frequent bed-wetting. Is this a common condition and how should it be handled?

**LOOK, MOM, NO DIAPERS**  
Bring out the potty. Summer is the ideal time to learn.

and a half. But when he did, he became very verbal. When Finn began nursery school at age 3, he was the only child to resist sitting at the snack table. He'd stand up, happily eating his juice and crackers, and chatting with the nearby kids. These days, at his Taek Won Do class, he is the only child who insists on wearing his socks, while all the other kids are in bare feet.

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## BRIBE IS SUCH AN UGLY WORD

**Since Finn's obstacles seem to be more psychological than physical, we decided to offer him a special incentive for trying to get out of diapers.** We bought a special toy that he really wants, and told him that he would get it when he reaches 5 points. The way he earns points is to either not wear a diaper at night, or to try pooping on the potty. Either event earns him a point. We reassure him that it is okay to have accidents. In fact, everyone makes mistakes when they are trying to master something difficult or new.

As of today, we've had some success. Finn has gone to bed three nights in a row without wearing a "night-night diaper." In the mornings, he usually greets me with, "Daddy, I had an accident." I reassure him that this sometimes happens and congratulate him on trying to not wear a diaper. I also remind him that his bed has a plastic sheet over it, so the mattress didn't get wet, and that I'll have his sheets good as new by that evening.

However, Finn will still have nothing to do with pooping on the potty. Something about the experience is still too intimidating. Perhaps we'll have to come up with some irresistible incentive? Maybe there's a great storybook on the subject that we can read to Finn for inspiration? (HARRY POTTY AND THE DIABOLICAL DIAPER DEMONS?) One thing is clear. The day that Finn sets his mind to mastering this skill, he will try it with great enthusiasm. Until then, we'll be patient, provide incentives, and try to keep our senses of humor.



**TOILET TRAINING TRIALS**  
[What's to be done when a 3-1/2-year-old child shows no interest in learning to potty?](#)

**DIARY OF A POTTY-TEACHING MOM**  
[One mother's journal of the joys and dejections on the road to potty autonomy.](#)

**BOTHERSOME BED-WETTING**  
[My 3 year old uses the toilet, but still wets her bed once in a while. What can I do?](#)

**SENSE OF SELF: TWO TO FIVE**  
[When a preschooler continually says no, he is asserting his sense of self and letting you know he controls what he does.](#)

**SELF-CONTROL: TWO TO FIVE**  
[Preschoolers are better at reining themselves in.](#)

**PERSONALITY: TWO TO FIVE**

[Tips for developing a "can-do" attitude in your preschooler.](#)

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## SISTER SEES, SISTER DOES

**Even though Finn's sister Olivia is only 18 months old, it wouldn't surprise me if by the end of this summer, she's mostly out of diapers.** Olivia is eager to learn how to walk, excited about learning new words, and much more. Of course every kid is different, but one of the reasons for Olivia's accelerated development is her older sibling. Her big brother provides both the example and the motivation for many of her actions. When they play together, she constantly imitates him. I can almost hear Olivia challenging Finn, "Anything you can do, I can do better."



Ellen and I have a dream. It's hard to imagine exactly when it will happen, but some day--some marvelous, magical day in the next year or so--we'll go to the supermarket or department store and we won't have "diapers" on the list.

Best of luck as you help your young ones figure out how to master potty skills.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

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## Weekly Trivia

**What song would Oscar never sing on Sesame Street?**

- A. I Love Trash
- B. Oh Happy Day
- C. I Wanna Hold Your Trash
- D. Trash Can Blues

Well if you know Oscar, you know that there's no way you'd ever catch him singing (B) Oh, Happy Day (Unless maybe no one else was around.)

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## FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

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### COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

### ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org)

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