

Sesame Family Newsletter Archive

News and Notes from the Workshop
Posted by Jordan Brown

SESAME FAMILY NEWSLETTER---The Potty Chronicles
January 21, 2004

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***GETTING THE POOP ON TOILET TRAINING

Teaching our son Finn to use the toilet has been both fascinating and frustrating. In a few weeks Finn will turn 3, and still be wearing diapers. When my parental anxiety gets the better of me, I wonder if he'll be out of Pampers before I'm wearing Depends.

My wife Ellen and I began teaching Finn how to use the toilet last June. We had heard that the summer is a good time for toilet training because there are fewer layers of clothes to remove. We bought him a plastic potty, and switched him to pull-up diapers (one step closer to real underpants). To find out the best ways to approach potty training, we consulted a variety of books and articles. We found some helpful and reassuring advice on Sesame Workshop's Web site.

TOILET TRAINING

Don't stress out if your child is a slow toilet trainee.
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=963>

LOOK, MOM, NO DIAPERS

Recognizing readiness and tips for success.
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=760>

***DEVELOPING A CAN-DOO-DOO ATTITUDE

We also spoke to a number of parents about how they went about teaching their children to use the potty. In a nutshell, they urged us to make things as casual and un-stressful as possible, and to anticipate a lot of setbacks. Like learning to walk and talk, we were reminded, every child has a different timetable when it comes to learning to use the toilet. More than one parent warned us about the dangers of pressuring Finn. One friend told us that as a result of making too big a deal of their son using the potty, the child rebelled by being constipated for three days. Over and over again we heard: When he's ready, he'll let us know.

Using the potty is not the only thing Finn is ambivalent about these days. Ellen and I were surprised to discover that our son is not all that comfortable with the idea of turning 3. For the last month or so, when the topic of his birthday comes up, he often says, "Stay 2. Stay 2. Not want to be 3." When we were watching TV with him recently, we saw a cute infant in a commercial. Thinking it would boost his confidence, I

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said something like, "Finn, you're not a baby anymore, you're a big boy now."

He sighed and said, "It's hard being a big boy."

With tears in our eyes, we hugged him, and told him how much we loved him. From the articles we've read, it seems that sometimes even when a child is physically ready to use the toilet, he or she may not be emotionally prepared. Using the toilet--like turning a year older--is admitting that babyhood is over.

In an effort to keep toilet training fun and stress-free, we invented some fun potty games. For example, I sometimes move the lid of his potty up and down as if it's a mouth, and give it a high-pitched voice. Sometimes our toilet and his potty sing duets together.

THE P WORD

It's potty time!

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=799>

***A TRICKLE OF SUCCESS

Last August, Finn peed on his potty for the first time. Everyone in the family was so proud. (The only one who was a little perplexed was our dog Satchmo. He gave us a look as if to say, "Hey, when I pee in the house, you get mad. But now when Finn does it, you're elated. What gives?"). Finn's enthusiasm to use the potty for peeing continued for a couple months. Whenever we were changing his diaper, he'd say "pee-pee! pee-pee!" and we'd eagerly rush him to the bathroom. Then around October, he seemed to lose interest. The novelty was over. Not wanting to put too much pressure on him, we decided to take it easy for a while. In the meantime, we talked to more parents, and read some more articles on the topic.

TOILET TRAINING TRIALS

What's to be done when a 3-1/2-year-old child shows no interest in learning to potty?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=943>

DIARY OF A POTTY-TEACHING MOM

One mother's journal of the joys and dejections on the road to potty autonomy.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=726>

BOTHERSOME BED-WETTING

My 3 year old uses the toilet, but still wets her bed once in a while. What can I do about it?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=874>

***POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT OR SHAMELESS BRIBERY?

Inspired by the Sesame Workshop article "Diary of a Potty-Teaching Mom," (see above link) I decided to keep a diary of Finn's toilet training experiences. I suspected that we still had months to go and I didn't trust my memory to capture the details. Here are a few choice entries:

October 8

Several of the books say that it is easier to teach a child to poop on the potty than to pee. The logic is that a toddler has greater control over their bowels than their bladder. This is not the case with Finn. Today, while sitting on his potty, he told us thoughtfully, "Peeing is easy. Poop is hard."

October 30

Maybe Finn isn't ready. Whenever we offer the potty, he resists it. Even when we're in the middle of changing a very poopy diaper, he protests, "No wipe! No wipe!"

November 8

Tonight after undressing him for his bath, I asked Finn if he wanted to

sit on his potty. He declined the offer. After the bath, I had to go myself, so I announced that I would be using Finn's potty. As I prepared to go, I moved the lid of the potty and pretended it was talking to me in a high voice, "Nooooo! That's Finn's potty, Daddy." Finn got a big laugh out of it. I'm trying to keep things light, even though I'm secretly frustrated.

November 12

A friend lent us ONCE UPON A POTTY, a cute book by Alona Frankel about a boy named Joshua who learns to use the toilet. Finn is utterly entranced by it. He asks Ellen and me to read it to him again and again. He especially loves looking at the page where Joshua isn't able to get to the potty in time, and goes on the floor. While looking at a picture of Joshua on the potty, he pointed to the page and said, "Very hard."

November 18

Stop the presses! With the incentive of a mini Reese's peanut butter cup, Finn went to the potty, sat on it, and waited until he peed. While Ellen and I try to limit Finn's sugar intake, we've found that offering a little candy is one of the few things that helps him get over his resistance to using his potty.

December 28

While watching MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD with Finn, Mr. Rogers read a picture book called POTTY. Finn was captivated, though I did have to explain some of Mr. R's more formal terminology. I told Finn that "urine" and "BMs" were the same things as pee and poop.

January 5

This morning we were packing up for a trip. Many of Finn's things--including his potty--were in the car. After his bath, he started peeing on the floor. Looking around for his potty, and not finding it, I panicked. Then, thinking quickly, I asked Finn if he wanted to sit on Mommy and Daddy's potty. I assured him that I would hold him so he wouldn't fall off. It worked. Finn was very proud. And, miraculously, there was no chocolate involved.

***SESAME STREET MUSIC WORKS

Finn's potty usually lives in our bathroom. Ellen and I have discovered, however, that sometimes it is a smart idea to bring the potty to wherever Finn is playing. Recently, he was in our living room, listening to one of his favorite CDs--PHILADELPHIA CHICKENS by Sandra Boynton. He had just had a lot of juice to drink, so I knew that he'd need to use the potty any minute. Figuring that a little distraction is a good thing, I brought his potty into the living room, helped him take off his pants, and he happily peed as the frantic and silly "Busy, Busy, Busy" song played in the background.

***TODDLERHOOD VERSUS MIDDLE-AGE

Now that I'm in my 40s, I find that I sometimes have to get up in the middle of the night to use the toilet. When I do this, I think of Finn lying on his bed sweetly peeing in his diapers as he dreams. I recently remembered a very short and funny poem I had read years ago from Judith Viorst's book IF I WERE IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD AND OTHER WORRIES: POEMS FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS. In it, she shares the sentiments of many adults who deal with the hassle of having to interrupt bedtime for the bathroom:

Maybe things were better
When I was a wetter.

***SESAME STREET BEAT

In an upcoming episode of Sesame Street, the Big Bad Wolf's brother Leonard comes to Sesame Street. During his visit, Leonard is accused of blowing down Elmo and Zoe's block structure of the letter 'U'. He promises that it was not him, but he is still held responsible.

Did Leonard do it? Check your local PBS station to find out when this episode is airing where you live. Then join your Sesame pals for some online fun.

PBS KIDS: WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=9697605>

THE NUMBER OF THE DAY IS 11

Help celebrate Rosita's birthday with this one-derful printable.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=3083>

THE LAUNDRY GAME

Help Elmo sort the laundry in this shape-matching game!

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=111824>

ELMO'S CLOUDS GAME

Create a cloud formation and watch it come to life in this interactive Elmo game!

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=4095465>

Did you know...

Sonia Manzano, who plays Maria, once said "If there were another man in my life, it would be Oscar?" Don't tell Luis! Look closely at future episodes to see if there are any sparks between Oscar and Maria.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

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