



# SPD'S EFFECT ON TOILETING

from *The Out-of-Sync Child, 3rd edition: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Differences* (Tarcher/Perigee, 2022)

By Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA

As everyone reading this magazine knows, eating, toileting, and sleeping are three big challenges for children with autism and sensory processing differences (SPD). In this issue of *Autism Digest*, let's consider SPD's effect on toileting. (The November-January issue included an article about eating; the February-March issue will include one on sleeping.)

Just as nobody can make a child eat, nobody can make a child poop. The sensations involved in this job may overwhelm -- or "underwhelm" -- a child with SPD. Sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations associated with bowel movements may be distressing and cause

the overresponsive child (the "sensory avoider") to steer clear of the toilet. An underresponsive child (the "sensory straggler") may not notice the sensory signals coming from her interoceptive system telling her that she needs to use the bathroom. (See box: *SPD's Effect on Toilet Training*.)

Part of the pooping problem is with the food that the child takes in. What goes in comes out. Sometimes, what goes in gets stuck on the way out; other times it gushes out. The picky eater or problem feeder who has a limited diet and declines healthful foods with naturally bright color, varied texture, and lots of fiber -- the stuff of stool, if you will -- is likely to have chronic constipation or diarrhea.

Another common problem is *encopresis*, which is defecating into clothing or in bed. The child may develop problems with bladder control, as well. He may wait too long to use the toilet, frequently wet his clothes, and become a chronic bed-wetter. This is called *enuresis*.

Suggestions from Maria Wheeler, a behavior specialist and author of *Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism and other Developmental Issues*, include:

- Plenty of water, fiber, and active movement throughout the day.
- A visual toileting schedule.
- Comfortable clothing during toilet training.
- A step stool under the child's feet to help him feel grounded while on the toilet.

- Working with an OT, nutritionist, or other professional with expertise in bladder and bowel problems.

Cara Koscinski, "The Pocket OT," suggests these and other options in her book, *Interoception -- How I Feel: Sensing My World from the Inside Out*:

- Calming music.
- Creme with pleasant scents dabbed on the child's skin.
- Reading aloud while the child sits.
- Sensory fidgets.
- Talking about body awareness and what the child is feeling in his belly and organs when the stool and urine come out.

And here are two ideas from my book, *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*:

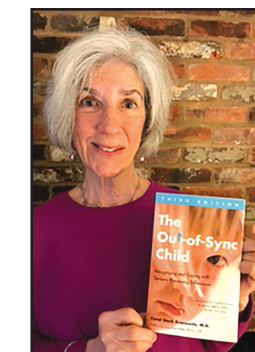
- "Tor-Pee-Do" -- Toss Cheerios or

- biodegradable packaging "peanuts" into the toilet and have your little boy get ready, aim, and fire away. (Sorry, girls!)
- "Doodle-Doo" -- Slip a plastic bag over the toilet seat lid. Tape one end of a string to a marker; tie the other end of the string to a metal washer and drop it into the toilet tank to prevent the marker from falling into the toilet bowl. Invite your child to sit backward on the toilet seat, facing the lid, and to doodle on the plastic bag while doo-doo-ing into the toilet.

These ideas may help your child get in sync and develop more mature coping strategies around urinating and defecating into the toilet. Let's make everyone comfortable and successful with this essential, everyday activity! ■

Carol Stock Kranowitz is the author of the "Sync" series, including *The Out-of-Sync Child, 3rd edition*, and *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*, which has many enjoyable sensory-motor activities to help children function more smoothly.

[www.out-of-sync-child.com](http://www.out-of-sync-child.com)  
[www.insyncchild.com](http://www.insyncchild.com)



## SPD'S EFFECT ON TOILET TRAINING



**Differences in the child's response to sensations may cause toileting problems.**

- **Sight:** Seeing stool may make the child squeamish, or she may want to examine it right away and for a long time, since she "made it."
- **Touch:** The overresponsive child may avoid pooping because it is wet and sticky. The underresponsive child who is unaware of wetness may not develop efficient bladder control. (Thick disposable diapers that carry wetness away to keep the child comfortably dry are part of the problem!) The "sensory craver" may actually like how poop feels in pants...or hands.

- **Smell:** Some children will be repelled by the smell and resist going near a toilet. Others may be interested in the odor because it came from their own body.
- **Sound:** A noisy flushing toilet may overwhelm the child with sensitive hearing. Another child may repeatedly flush because he likes hearing (and seeing) the action in the toilet.
- **Body position:** An inefficient sense of body parts and muscles may make it hard for the child to "hold it." A postural challenge may be staying poised on the toilet seat.
- **Movement:** The child who is sedentary because of difficulty moving his body may also have difficulty moving his bowels. The child may feel unbalanced and ungrounded, as if he is falling off the toilet -- or worse, into the toilet..
- **Internal organs:** The child may not recognize bladder or bowel fullness. Or the child may feel he has to use the toilet far more often than other children do.