

Toilet Training: A Supplementary Recommendation

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Abstract

A brief note recommending a tactic to supplement practices taught in toilet training. It should prove effective for children and developmentally disabled persons who have satisfactory manual dexterity, as well as people of all ages. It presents a tactic for wiping following bowel movement that would be helpful for a variety of behavior trainers, their clients, as well as the general public. It would also benefit the environment (reduced paper and water waste).

Dedicated Skinnerians had focused their initial efforts on modifying the behavior of rats and pigeons; then, in the case of the Brelands (1961), a variety of animals such as rabbits, pigs, ducks, whales, and raccoons; eventually came applications to humans. When first published in 1968, Azrin and Foxx's (2019) "Toilet Training in Less Than a Day" was a landmark. The tactics, based on empirically derived principles, are effective and make use of positive incentives, which is characteristic of the humanitarian folks who engage in applied operant work. It is merely suggested here that there may be a call for some minor but modestly sophisticated extensions pertaining to the use of toilet tissue that are worth implementing once the child has demonstrated readiness in the form of a reasonable level of manual dexterity. Hence, although the Azrin and Foxx regimen is suitable for children at least 20 months of age, this extension may require children to be a bit older. It definitely is recommended for persons of all ages.

If a bathroom visit is limited to expulsion of urine, then concluding activities are simple: males simply shake or wring out, whereas females are admonished to wipe to the rear. So much for that matter. Actions following expulsion of feces are a bit more complex—always with advice to wipe to the rear. But there seems to be no guidance or instruction beyond just that, such as Azrin and Fox's one-sentence admonition to wipe.

Rather than a matter of behavioral training, wiping seems to be more a matter of biomechanical engineering and common sense. Consider the following. The individual has moved bowels, with the probability that there is some

residual fecal matter on the anus. If a single finger, covered by toilet paper, were used to wipe, then there is high likelihood that the matter would merely be pushed to the side—making the situation messier. (Next best could be a wad of toilet paper¹; but this, too, can result in smearing.) It is suggested here that albeit complex, the optimal stepwise strategy is as follows. Following expulsion with positive pressure, flex sphincters to squeeze off possible residual feces. Next, lay a sheet or three (depending on ply) of toilet paper on the thigh on the side of the preferred hand and place the hand upon it with the second and third digits spread (the thumb being scored as first). Close those two fingers in order to create a pleat of toilet paper between them as well as a means of picking up the tissue. Move the hand along the thigh to the rear and position those two fingers at the perineum, one on each side. An upward and to the rear wiping motion will now push residual feces toward the meatus and capture matter in the pocket. This approach can be repeated as needed; then concluded with a swipe down the center with last paper folded closed or using fresh paper.

Initially, the trainer could foster this behavior making use of response-contingent reinforcers, to include snacks, approval, and Azrin and Foxx's "friends-who-care" procedure. In short order, intrinsic motivation will suffice and the learner will take pride in virtually no soiling of underwear and far less wasted paper.

Reference

Azrin, N., & Foxx, R.M. (2019). Toilet Training in Less Than a Day. Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster.

Breland, K., & Breland, M. (1961). The Misbehavior of Organisms. American Psychologist, 16, 681-684.

Footnote

1. According to an issue of "Tidbits[®]" newspaper, the percent of people who crumple their toilet paper rather than fold it is 60%. There also is a gender difference with males allegedly more inclined to fold (unspecified) than wad. But this difference may be due to asking about wiping in general, and not specifying anus: www.whyienjoy.com/how-to-fold-toilet-paper-to-wipe/