

Potty panic

My 2-year-old daughter is trying to potty train herself. I'm playing dumb.



Mommy Confidential
by Trisha Blanchet

"Potty? What potty?" I ask.
"Let's go read a book!"

"No book," she says firmly.
"Potty."

"Maybe later, honey." She walks away. A few

minutes later she reappears, sans pants.

"Potty," she says again.
"Potty."

I drop my head into my hands.

I know what you're thinking: What's wrong with this lady? Doesn't she want to be done with the most disgusting chore of parenthood? Doesn't she want her daughter to reach this important milestone? Of course I do. Just not yet.

"I think she wants to learn how to use the potty," my son announces.

"Yes, I'm getting that feeling."

"We should teach her," he says. "I'll do it."

A generous offer. And I'm thinking about taking him up on it. Considering how things went the first time around, I'm pretty sure a 5-year-old could do a better job than me, anyway.

I'm still not sure how I managed to botch things so badly. I bought all the books; I even attended a seminar at the library. What I thought would be a simple process with a beginning, middle, and end somehow morphed into an on-again/off-again game that tested the limits of my patience-and my carpet cleaner. I'd rather change diapers for the next 15 years than dip my toe in that yellow pool again anytime soon.

"It will be easier with a girl," everyone tells me. I'm hoping they're all right. Because it sure as heck couldn't be harder.

To this day, I can't see a sticker-reward chart without cringing. We tried that. We stuck stickers to charts, walls, hands, feet, and anything else that was reasonably flat and dry. Didn't work.

So I upped the ante. Forget stickers: Now I was offering fire engines. Race cars. Dump trucks. I lined them all up on the sink like a Bribery Motorcade. That worked, but only briefly. All rightee. Out went the cars, in came the candy.

Eventually we made progress, and I felt confident enough to take The Potty Show on the road. That's when the real fun began.

Most of us prefer our encounters with public bathrooms to be speedy. In and out. But all that changes when you're in the stall with a 3-year-old. Suddenly you're like a claustrophobic, caged animal, kneeling on sticky tile while belting out a 20-minute rendition of "The Wheels on the Bus." You're trying not to touch anything or look too closely at ... well, at anything. You find yourself muttering strange prayers, such as: "Please, please, let that be chocolate over there." You start fantasizing about trading in your Levi's for a Hazmat suit with a vapor-tight mask.

I haven't sat on those bathroom floors in a while, now. I'm not eager to return. I'm also not eager to carry a potty seat and back-up clothes everywhere I go, or to run like a crazy woman through Macy's shouting, "Where's the bathroom? She has to go! For the love of God, where's the bathroom?"

While I'm lost in thought, my daughter approaches again.

"Potty," she says. It's more of a command than a question. And down the rabbit hole we go.

Questions or comments?

Write to
mommy@lowellsun.com.

The ABCs of childhood

A is for aquarium. This is a fun-filled destination where we are now banned for life. It's so unfair. If they don't want you to put the starfish in your pockets, they should say so.

B is for bubbles. You know the drill: Dip the wand into the bottle, blow, and then spill the rest onto your pants.



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C is for "creative listening." This is how you manage to hear your father mutter a swear word in the next room, but not hear him scream your name from five feet away.

D is for drama. Cook up lots of this when your folks are asking you to do something outrageously unreasonable, like brush your hair.

E is for empty. This is usually how your toy bin looks because all your stuff is strewn all over the floor. Hey, I understand. You need to know all your options, right?

F is for fireplace. This is the most dangerous spot in the house. So naturally you'll want to teeter near here as much as possible, especially while you're learning to walk.

G is for garbage disposal. This is where your mother's four-course, Julia Child-inspired meal will end up after you stare at it stubbornly for 45 minutes.

H is for heating pad. This is what your daddy will need after you play pig-pile on his back for the better part of an hour.

I is for Ice Cream Man. All the other kids are getting some, so why shouldn't you? Huh? Huh?

J is for juice. This is why the couch now looks like it has liver spots.

K is for kick. You tried this with the cat once. It didn't work out so well.

L is for leave. This is what your parents want you to do just when you're starting to have fun. It never fails.

M is for "maybe." This is how grown-ups will answer almost every question you ask. Between you and me, I think they're just stalling.

N is for "never say never." You might think you won't want to ride your scooter head-first into a chain-link fence, but why limit your options?

O is for oven. This is where you'll stash all your plastic dinosaurs when nobody's watching. Then, when mom preheats for dinner: Look! It's dinosaur pudding! How fun.

P is for panic attack. This is what your mommy will have after you decide to play hide-and-seek in the department store's clothing racks.

Q is for quick. You'll want to avoid this, especially when everyone seems to be in a rush to get to church, school, or the emergency room.

R is for really, really, really, really, really don't want a flu shot.

S is for stomp. You know: foot, ground, etc. You've got this one covered.

T is for teeth. These are what you're rotting with every Dum Dum, Kit Kat, and Ho Ho. But what the heck: They're falling out anyway. You're a kid!

U is for underwear. At some point, your parents will put all kinds of crazy pressure on you to wear these instead of diapers. Blah blah blah.

V is for vegetables. Grown-ups will cover them in cheese sauce, grind them up into meatballs, and even tell you they're "yummy." Don't fall for it.

W is for washed. This is what happens to your dirty socks and dinner dishes when you're not looking. It's like magic.

X is for X-ray. This is what you'll need after you swallow your big brother's Legos. Only the red ones, though, because those taste better.

Y is for Yukon Jack whiskey. This is what your parents will need after you get the X-ray.

Z is for zero. This is how many raspberries will be left in the container after you discover it in the fridge. Don't worry, though. The red stains on your fingers and face won't give you away at all. Just repeat after me: "Raspberries? What raspberries?"

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2009

A peculiar park pilgrimage

I took the kids for a hike in a state park a few weeks ago. Spring was in its full splendor, and we were surrounded by beauty at every turn. So naturally, we spent almost the entire visit talking about horse poop.

"Look, Mommy! There's some more!"

They delighted in the disgusting qualities of each and every pile. We talked about how gross it smelled. We discussed, at length, the size of each mound. We pondered if they were all the product of one horse, or if multiple horses had left the deposits behind. It was a truly scintillating conversation.

I was relieved when my 5-year-old finally moved on to a new topic.

"OK," he announced, "now you have to name all the words you can think of that start with the letter P."

"I do?"

"Yes."

All rightee. "Peanut," I said.

"Good." He nodded approvingly.

"Um ... Petunia."

"Uh huh."

This vocabulary quiz went on, and on, and on. Let me tell you, you really haven't lived until you've pushed a stroller up a steep, rocky incline in 80-degree heat while trying to think of words like "platypus," "pumpernickel," and "puke." By the time I got to "Patagonia," I was feeling a little faint.

Luckily, that was when my son discovered a walking stick in the woods. It was love at first sight. He tapped the stick purposefully on the ground as he walked. He used it to reach tall leaves, and to dig holes in the dirt.



He was so proud of his new tool that he wanted to tell the world.

Unfortunately, he did this by approaching total strangers on the trail and saying, "Hi! You wanna touch my stick?"

"His walking stick," I added quickly. "The, uh, the stick there. Right there. Yep. Let's go, honey."

I hurried him down the path. And just when my red-flushed cheeks began to return to their normal color, my son stopped in his tracks and turned to face me.

"Mommy?"

"Yes?"

"Who's going to be my mommy when I'm all grown up?"

My eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Well, I will, honey."

"You always get to be my mommy, even when I'm big?"

"Yes, of course."

Then he asked about his father, and his grandparents, and his friends. He wanted to know: Would they always be there? Always and forever?

I knew the quick and easy answer, of course. I should tell him that no one will ever leave him, that everyone he loves will always be around to love him back. But I hesitated. Was this the right time to tell him that nobody gets to live forever? Was he old enough to handle such a difficult truth?

As I wrestled with my moral dilemma, he turned suddenly and pointed to the ground.

"Look, Mommy! More horse poop!"

I exhaled. Saved by the poop.

A few minutes later, we came to a fork in the trail. "Which way?" my son asked.

"I'm not sure," I said. "You pick." I wasn't worried about getting lost. After all, I had plenty of water, plenty of snacks, and at least 12 words that started with the letter Q. We could last a week out there.

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