
UNIT 16 TRAINING IN DAILY LIVING SKILLS – PART II: TOILET TRAINING

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we describe how to help the child participate and acquire the daily living skill of independent toileting. The child's abilities will determine to what extent he can achieve independence in this activity and the aids and adaptations he needs.

Objectives

How will this Unit help you?

This Unit will help you to understand and become familiar with:

- 1 the components of the activity of toileting;
- 1 the common concerns and doubts in the minds of parents with respect to toilet training;
- 1 the difficulties faced by the child with cerebral palsy in the toilet training process and the ways of overcoming them;
- 1 aids and adaptations in the toilet and the clothes that can facilitate independent toileting;
- 1 aids and adaptations for the child to carry out toileting in the lying position; and
- 1 guidelines to be kept in mind during toilet training.

16.2 TOILET TRAINING

By 'toilet training' we mean 'the process of helping the child to learn to use the toilet in order to stay clean and dry'.

The basic daily activity of going to the toilet involves a number of tasks:

- 1 Recognizing that one needs to go to the toilet
- 1 Telling others about one's toilet needs
- 1 Holding on till one reaches the toilet
- 1 Going to the toilet
- 1 Undressing
- 1 Relieving oneself at the right place
- 1 Washing oneself
- 1 Dressing oneself again
- 1 Disposal of waste
- 1 Washing one's hands

Being toilet trained is an important milestone for a child – however, achieving this does not happen overnight. It can take anywhere between a few weeks to a few months for the child to achieve toilet control. **The process of moving the child from nappies to using the potty and the toilet is as important for children with cerebral palsy as for others.**

Typically, children achieve day time control between 2-3 years of age. By 'daytime control' we mean that they are able to indicate their need to go to the toilet most of the time during the day, though occasional accidents might still occur. Complete toilet training - i.e., day time and night time control – happens between 5-6 years of age.

16.2.1 Common Concerns of Parents

1 “When do we start toilet training?”

This is a question that most parents would like an answer to. Is the child ready to be toilet trained? Instead of going by age guidelines or criteria, the answer is actually to carefully observe the child and see whether he shows signs that he is now ready for toilet training. **Some of the signs that the parent should look out for, which are indicative of readiness for a toilet training are:**

- Does the child stay dry for an hour or two? This shows that he has enough bladder control to hold on.
- Does the child know that he is wetting/soiling right then, as he is doing it ?
- Does the child show observable signs of the need to relieve himself (e.g. by suddenly becoming quiet, crossing the legs, making faces or sounds)? This shows that the child is aware that he is about to relieve himself.
- Is the child able to understand and follow simple instructions? This shows that he is ready to participate in the training process.
- Does he understand words related to the toilet?

Some children with cerebral palsy will begin to show the above signs by the time they are two years old. This means you can begin toilet training. If the child does not have enough bladder control or awareness, wait until he is a little older. **Some children with cerebral palsy are slow in developing bladder control.**

1 **“My child will never be independent. Is there any point trying to toilet train him?”**

Some parents may doubt whether there is any point in training a child who has such physical limitations that he may never be able to use the toilet independently. The physical limitations might discourage the parents from making any efforts to toilet train him. **Toilet training is not just about independence – participation will also increase the child’s level of confidence and self-esteem.**

Cerebral palsy is a condition that affects persons in different ways. No two persons with cerebral palsy are alike – so it is impossible to make general statements about toilet training. Even though physical difficulties is one common characteristic which all persons with cerebral palsy are likely to face, how much independence a child is ultimately able to achieve with respect to toileting will vary from child to child. Some might achieve full independence while others might be able to perform some steps independently. Some might participate in the process while others may be totally dependent on the caregivers. **Even if the child cannot be completely independent, make him participate in the process, letting him do the tasks he can.** Assistive devices will facilitate the child in participating as well as learning to be independent. You will read about these devices a little later in the Unit. A common misconception is that if the child cannot reach the toilet on his own, he is not ready to be toilet trained. But this not true.

1 **“My child cannot speak and cannot tell me when he wants to go to the toilet. Is there any point in toilet training him?”**

Some parents may think that there is no use of training a child who cannot speak, i.e., one who is non-verbal. Some children may not have clear verbal communication and might find it difficult to convey that they need to go to the toilet. Just because they cannot convey the message/ do not have the appropriate words, it does not mean that they are not ready to be toilet trained. If they show signs of readiness listed earlier, then we can go ahead with the training.

- A child who cannot speak can use the communication board which has the vocabulary related to toilet training.
- Alternatively, you can place the potty in a place where the child can see it, so that the child can point to it whenever he feels the need.
- Remember to use the same signs/words each time you want the child to use the toilet.

- If the child does not seem to understand language and follow instructions, it could be because he has difficulty in hearing or has mental retardation. In this case, you would need to use gestures or signs to communicate with the child. Signs and gestures would need to be worked out for ‘wet’, ‘dry’; ‘dirty’, ‘clean’, ‘pot’, and ‘latrine’.

16.3 THE TOILET TRAINING PROCESS

Before beginning with the toilet training, you must also ensure that there are no medical concerns related to toileting and if there are any, they are attended to. For example, if the child has constipation, then it is important to work out a solution for that before starting toilet training. The doctor might prescribe medication or suggest a change in the diet.

Once you are sure that the child is ready to learn, you can begin the toilet training process, in the following way:

- 1 Initiate the toilet training process by making a record of the time of the day when the child urinates and defecates, for about a week. Identify the times in the day when the child urinates, for example, after waking up in the morning or after a meal. With this, you would get some idea about the intervals at which the child would need to use the toilet.
- 1 Then start taking the child to the toilet at these timings, even if the child does not indicate the need.
- 1 Encourage the child to urinate by saying the specific word or gesture that the child understands. If the child does not use the toilet in 4-5 minutes, do not force him. He probably does not need to! In such a situation, do not make the child feel bad or scold him, because this will make him dislike the process.
- 1 If the child passes urine or stools in the toilet and does not soil his clothes, **praise the child**. During the training period, some accidents will occur and he will wet or soil himself. Do not punish him for these. Gently remind him to be more careful the next time.
- 1 At the same time, it is also possible that in the beginning of the training, the child may not pass urine/stools in the toilet when you take him, but may do so immediately after you bring him out of the toilet! This happens because it will take the child some time to adjust to the new situation. When he does so, explain to the child the need to pass stools at the proper place. However, do not scold or hit the child.
- 1 Most importantly, **be consistent in your training**. If you sometimes take the child to the toilet and sometimes do not take him, letting him relieve himself where he wants to, then he is not likely to learn.
- 1 **Each time you take the child to the toilet, use the same gesture or the word for referring to the toilet**. Slowly, the child will learn to

associate the word/gesture with the act and will himself begin to use it to indicate his need.

- 1 You can also use a doll that wets to introduce toilet training, as shown in Fig. 1. This type of doll is available in the market. Ask the child to help you to train the doll for toileting by removing the doll's clothes, putting it on the pot and so on. Use the same pot for the doll which the child has to use for himself.

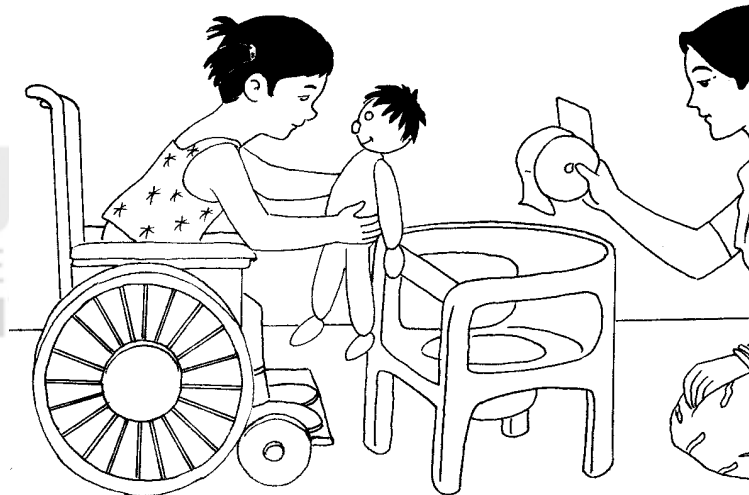


Fig. 1 : Using a doll to introduce toilet training

- 1 **Ensuring privacy is an important aspect which needs to be included right from the beginning while teaching toileting skills.** Always close the door of the toilet, even if you are taking him and helping him in the toilet. Remember to teach the child to close the toilet door (but not lock it) while he uses the toilet. Do not make him undress and sit on the pot in front of others, even if they are family members.

16.3.1 Difficulties Faced by Children with Cerebral Palsy

Many children with cerebral palsy face difficulties in being able to use the toilet independently. These difficulties could be due to stiffness of muscles, weak muscles or involuntary movements. The child may face difficulty in one or more of the following areas:

- Difficulty in reaching the toilet and accessibility of the toilet
- Difficulty in undressing
- Difficulty in squatting/sitting on the toilet seat
- Difficulty in washing
- Difficulty in dressing
- Difficulty in flushing/washing hands.

In the following sub-sections, we have taken up each of the aspects and described how aids and adaptations can help to overcome these difficulties and increase the child's participation.

16.3.2 Adaptations to Make the Toilet Accessible

If the child uses a wheelchair or a rolator for mobility, make sure that the door of the toilet is wide enough for the wheel chair or rolator to pass through. Inside the toilet, there should be enough space to keep the wheelchair or rolator, so that the child can transfer from the wheelchair to the toilet seat/w.c. Adding grab bars on the wall of the toilet, at the child's level, can help him to transfer himself from the wheelchair to the toilet seat and vice versa, by holding on to these bars. The floor should be non-slippery. The level of the washbasin should be at the level where the child can comfortably wash his hands. If the child crawls to the potty/seat, ensure that the bathroom is clean. Refer to Unit 28, on 'Barrier Free Environment', to know more about the adaptations that can be made in the toilet to enable the person with cerebral palsy to be independent and to prevent accidents.

16.3.3 Adaptations in Clothing

- 1 To make it easy for the child to unfasten his clothes and pull them up and down, use adaptations such as elastic or Velcro, in place of buttons/ hooks and draw strings.
- 1 If the child has trouble pulling down the underpants or trousers, use loose fitting clothing with elastic waist bands.
- 1 The correct position of the hands for lowering pants is by hooking the thumbs inside pants and pushing them down, as shown in Fig. 2.



Fig. 2 : The child has hooked his thumbs inside the pants and is pushing them down

To pull up the pants, the child should put the entire hand inside the pants and pull it over the hips, as shown in Fig.3.

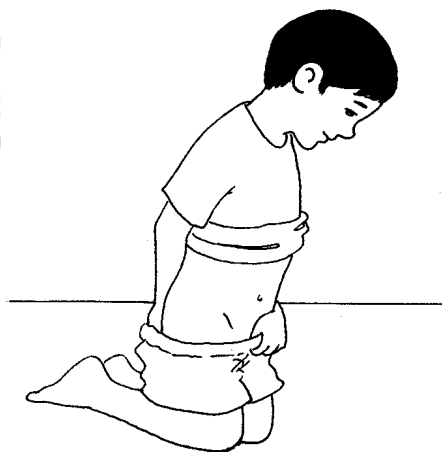


Fig. 3: The child puts the entire hand inside the pants and pulls it over the hips. Notice that the shirt has been pinned up out of the way.

1 A child may use a sturdy chair for support while pulling the trousers down or up, as shown in Fig. 4.

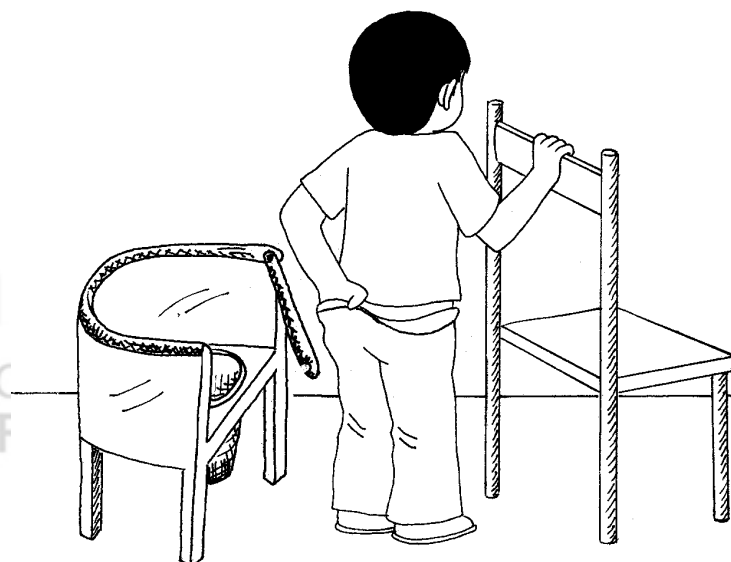


Fig. 4: Using the chair for support while pulling up the pants after toileting

1 Some children may find it easier to wear and remove the pants when they are lying down. Close the door of the bedroom while the child is dressing. Remember, the child needs privacy while doing so. You can place a big mat outside the bathroom which the child can use for this purpose.

16.3.4 Adaptations for Sitting/Squatting on the Toilet Seat

1 A simple pot or 'potty', as it is commonly called, is one of the main aids for toilet training of young children. It can be adapted in various ways for the disabled child. For example, the pot can be placed between the mother's knees. The mother's body provides back support and she can hold the child's shoulders and arms forward, his hips bent and his legs separated, as shown in Fig. 5. This position is helpful for children who feel insecure when sitting on the potty by themselves, who find it difficult to relax and sit forward, so that they can push with their abdominal muscles to empty their bowels.



Fig. 5: A good position for a young child during toileting

1) Independent Sitting/Squatting

Once the child is older, you have to train him to sit on the pot independently.

- 1 Some children have adequate sitting balance to sit on the potty/squat on the floor independently, but refuse/hesitate to use the toilet because they are afraid of falling, or they are unable to relax unless they have something to hold on to. For these children, **hand support can be provided**. There are various ways of providing this support:

— Fig. 6 shows that the child is squatting on the floor and is holding on to a stool for support.

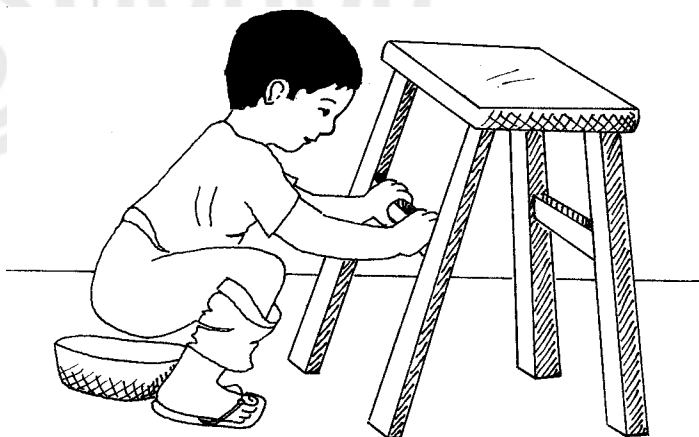


Fig. 6: Holding on to a stool for support

- If the child uses the toilet as used by the rest of the family, fix low handles or bars on the front wall or on either side of the walls in the toilet, so that the child can hold the bars as he sits. Fig. 7 shows how this may be done.



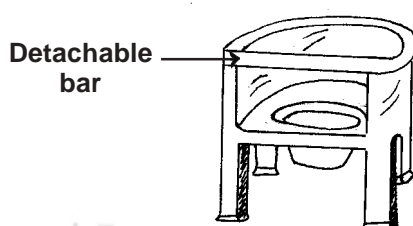
Fig. 7: Bars inside the toilet help the child to maintain balance while squatting

- If the child uses a potty but needs support to stabilize himself, the potty can be placed inside a stable and inverted table, with the table's bars to hold on to, as shown in Fig. 8.

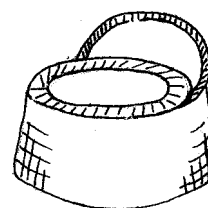


Fig. 8: Potty placed inside an inverted stool with bars to hold on to

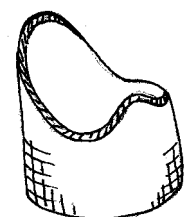
- 1 **Some child may need back support in order to sit independently.**
This can be provided in the following ways:
 - If the child can sit independently with some back support, you can use a potty chair which provides back support till the level the child requires, which has a detachable bar in the front, as shown in Fig. 9(a). Fig. 9 also shows various types of potties available in the market.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 9: Various types of potties that provide varying levels of back support

- The potty can also be placed in the corner of the room where the two walls meet. This will provide back support and make the child feel relaxed and secure. You can put a chair or a stool in front, which the child can hold on to.
- Another way to provide back and side support for a child who uses a potty is to make a sitting frame around the potty, like a corner seat, as shown in Fig. 10. This holds the child's arms and shoulders forward and helps to keep the hips bent. Two poles can be fixed into the sitting frame to keep the knees apart. If the child wants to hold on to something, either some furniture can be placed in front or a rod can be fixed to this corner seat.

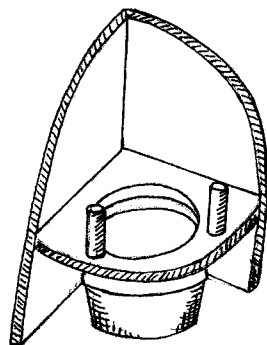


Fig. 10: A wooden frame fixed around the potty provides back and side support to the child

- You can also carve a hole in a stool or a chair with arm rests and back support. This stool or chair can be kept over the Indian style/western style toilet seat and then the child can sit on the chair or the stool, as shown in Fig. 11. If the chair cannot be kept over the w.c., a bucket can be placed under the chair to serve as the pot.

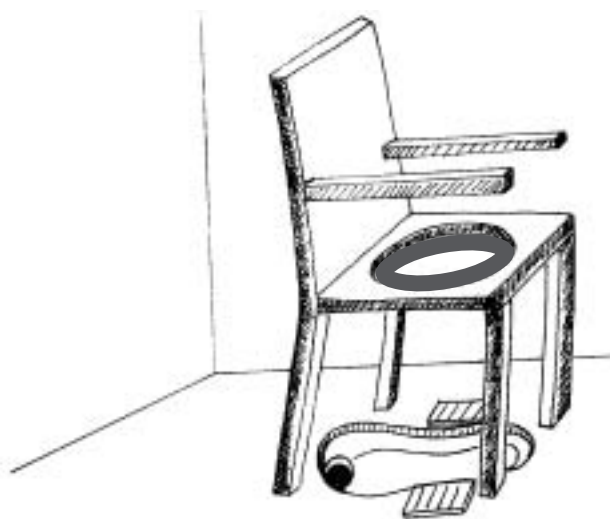


Fig. 11: A hole carved in the seat of the chair, which can be placed over the w.c. During the rest of the day, the hole can be covered with a wooden plank, with a cushion over it, and the chair can be used for sitting.

— The wheelchair or an ordinary chair can also be adapted as a toilet seat. A hole can be carved on the seat and the pot can be kept below the hole on a shelf in the chair, as shown in Fig.12 (a). To use it like an ordinary wheelchair for the rest of the time, you can cover the hole with a board and a cushion for ordinary sitting. Alternatively, you can leave the space under the wheelchair open, so that the whole chair can be placed or wheeled over a toilet, as shown in Fig. 12(b).

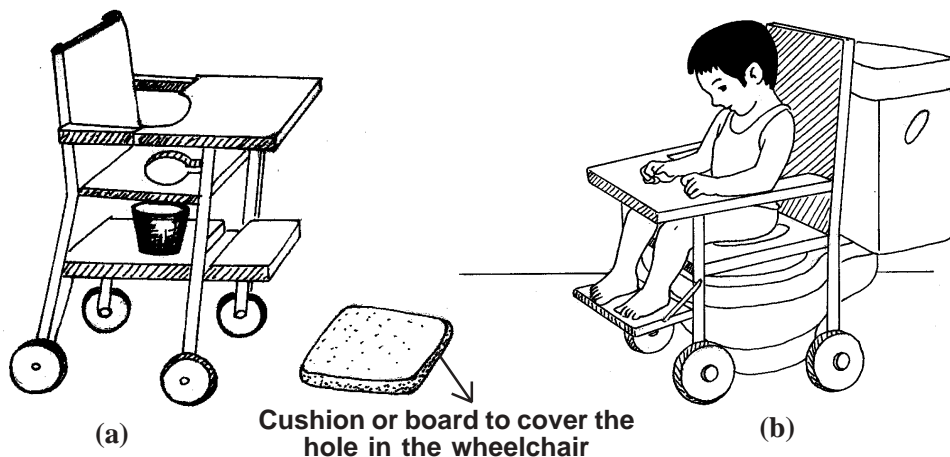


Fig. 12 (a) & (b): Adapting the wheelchair for toileting

— The Western style commode may be adapted in the following way – A plastic toilet seat with a raised backrest and flush guard at the front can be bought from the market. This fits into a standard western style toilet seat, as shown in Fig 13. It can be easily removed and cleaned and requires no extra fitting.

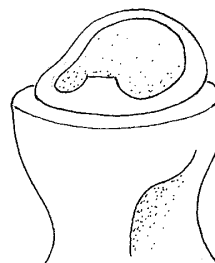


Fig. 13: Adapting a western style toilet by placing a plastic toilet seat over it

1 For a boy who wants to be independent, but does not have standing balance, you can use the kneeling position as shown in Fig. 14. You also provide a bar for support.



Fig. 14: The kneeling position enables the child to be independent

2) Aids and adaptations for older children who cannot sit (toileting in the lying position)

- 1 In case of a child who cannot sit, you can make a wedge-shaped toilet box using wood, as shown in Fig. 15. Carve out a hole in the wedge-shaped wooden piece, as shown Fig. 15(a). Then cut an old plastic bucket at the same angle as the hole of the toilet box so that it fits into it, as shown in Fig. 15(b). The edges of the bucket should be smoothed. This toilet box can be slipped under the child, as shown in Fig. 15(c). This serves as a bed pan. The bucket can be removed from the toilet box for cleaning it. Alternatively, you can also buy a bed pan from the market.

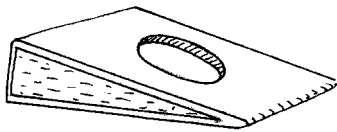


Fig. 15(a) : A wedge-shaped piece of wood in which a hole has been carved out. This is the toilet box.

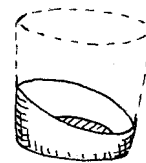


Fig. 15(b) : A pan cut out of a plastic bucket, so that it fits into the wooden toilet box.



Fig. 15(c) : This bed pan can be slipped under the child

16.3.5 Aids and Adaptations for Washing and Flushing after Toileting

Washing after defecation, pouring water/flushing the toilet, and washing hands after toileting are part of toileting skills – what and how you teach the child will depend on the child's ability.

- 1 If the child has the ability, train him to use one hand for cleaning after toileting, as the adult pours water. When the child can do this, train him to pour water by himself using one hand and clean using the other hand.
- 1 If he can use only one hand functionally, then we can teach him to use a water pipe. The water directly cleans the child's bottom, without him having to use his hand. These days the flush can be installed with a jet washer where the child has to only press a button and the water comes out to clean the child automatically.

- 1 You can also teach the child to use the toilet paper, as in this way cleaning may be done with one hand only and it is less messy.
- 1 Flushing after toileting can also be taught, if the child has the ability. These days the flush is fitted with buttons instead of handles. Some children find these easier to press. See what is appropriate for the child in terms of his hand function.

16.4 TOILET TRAINING FOR THE NIGHT

Once the child is toilet trained during the day, one can begin with night time toilet training. **Follow the guidelines given below:**

- If the child needs to drink any liquid (for example, water/milk) at night, let him have it well before his bed time—at least an hour before).
- Then take him to the toilet just before he goes to bed.
- If possible, note down approximately around what time he wets the bed in the night. Keep an alarm to ring every night around that time and take him to the toilet. If this is consistently done for 7-10 days, the child is likely to, on his own, wake you up to go to the toilet when he has the need, even without the alarm!
- Do not forget to praise him in the morning if the bed is dry.

16.5 LET US SUM UP

- 1 Toilet training refers to the process of helping the child to learn to use the toilet in order to stay clean and dry.
 - 1 Some children in spite of physical limitations can learn to be independent in toileting. Even if a child cannot be completely independent, initiate the training and make him participate in the process in whatever way he can.
 - 1 Ensure that there are no medical concerns before beginning toilet training.
 - 1 Keeping in mind the difficulties faced by the particular child, you would need to make different adaptations in order to enable the child to be independent. You may need to make adaptations in:
 - the toilet to make it accessible,
 - the clothes to enable the child to wear and remove them independently;
 - the washing and flushing procedure after toileting.
 - 1 In the Unit, we have given several suggestions as to how to make the above-mentioned adaptations.