

Externalising Language in Toilet Learning

Supporting Children Through Playful, Non-Blaming Communication

- Externalising language separates the **child from the behaviour or accident**
- The child is **not the problem**
- “Poo” or “wee” becomes the mischievous thing causing trouble
- Helps reduce **shame, pressure, and anxiety**
- Particularly effective for children with **PDA profiles**, who may resist direct demands

What Is Externalising Language?

Externalising language means **talking about a problem as something outside the child.**

Instead of:

- “Why didn’t you go to the toilet?”

Try:

- “Did the wee forget to tell you it was coming?”
- “Oh no, did the poo sneak out?”

Key idea:

- The child and adult **team up against the problem**

Why This Helps Children

Benefits include:

- Reduces **blame and shame**
- Maintains **self-esteem**
- Lowers **demand and pressure**
- Encourages **co-operation**
- Turns learning into **a playful problem-solving activity**

For children with **PDA profiles**:

- Direct instructions can trigger anxiety or avoidance

- Playful language **reduces perceived demand**

Making Poo and Wee the “Mischief Makers”

Children often respond well when bodily functions are treated like **cheeky characters**.

Examples:

- “Did that sneaky poo escape?”
- “Was your body playing tricks on you?”
- “Did the wee forget to give you a warning?”

This keeps the conversation:

- light
- humorous
- supportive

Teaming Up With the Child

Frame the adult and child as **detectives or problem solvers**.

Examples:

- “Let’s trick the poo next time and get him in the toilet!”
- “I think wee tried to be sneaky. How can we catch it next time?”
- “Shall we see if we can beat the poo to the toilet?”
- “Let’s keep an eye on that cheeky wee.”

The child becomes **part of the solution**.

More Playful Examples

Other ways to externalise:

- “Uh oh, the poo tried to escape!”
- “That was a speedy wee!”
- “The poo didn’t wait for the toilet this time.”
- “Did your tummy send a secret message we missed?”

- “Let’s see if we can catch the poo before it escapes.”

Keep tone:

- curious
- playful
- calm

When Accidents Happen

Respond calmly and matter-of-factly.

Example responses:

- “Looks like the poo got out before we caught it.”
- “Never mind, we’ll try to catch it next time.”
- “That sneaky wee came quickly!”

Focus on:

- **problem solving**
- **next time**
- **no blame**

Key Principles for Practitioners and Parents

- Stay **calm and neutral**
- Avoid blame or shame
- Use **humour and play**
- Keep the child **on your team**
- Reduce **direct demands**
- Focus on **learning, not mistakes**

Remember:

Children are **still learning how their body signals work.**

The Big Message

Toilet learning is not about **fault or failure**.

Externalising language helps children feel:

- safe
- supported
- confident
- willing to try again

Sometimes the goal is simply:

“Let’s see if we can outsmart that sneaky poo next time.”