



VICTORIAN CONTINENCE RESOURCE CENTRE



Tip sheet:

Using a pants alarm for toilet training

A pants alarm is worn during the day to help a child learn the feeling of needing to do a wee. They are often used as part of an intensive toilet training program.

What is a pants alarm?

A pants alarm is also called a personally-worn alarm. It is a small device used to detect when a child does a wee. A moisture-detecting sensor is attached to a pad in the child's underpants and a small alarm box is pinned to the outside of child's clothing – usually between the shoulder blades or at the back of the waist.

A pants alarm is worn during the day as part of an intensive toilet training program. We strongly recommend that if you are going to use a pants alarm you are supervised by a health professional who has been trained in their use for toilet training.

What is a pants alarm used for?

The purpose of the alarm is to alert both the child and the parent that the child has begun to pass wee. The child is then immediately taken to the toilet so that they get practice in toileting. Another advantage is that the child is more likely to do wee in the toilet during these practice trials. A pants alarm is only used for wee, not for poo.

Why use a pants alarm?

Pants alarms are useful when the child is not aware that their bladder is full and does not realise they are doing wee. When the alarm makes a sound this alerts the child to the fact that they are doing a wee. The child then learns to connect the feeling of a full bladder with the need to go to the toilet.

A program with a pants alarm is a first step towards independent toileting because it prompts the child to go and use the toilet for wee when their bladder is full.

Sometimes it is difficult for parents to detect the exact time wee is passed. A further advantage of the pants alarm is that it alerts parents to the fact that the child is doing wee. A pants alarm can also be a very useful device when assessing a child's readiness for toilet training, as it reveals how long a child can hold on to urine. The pants alarm can

be inserted into a disposable nappy, helping parents know more precisely the length of time between each wee.

How is a pants alarm used?

The pants alarm is worn during the day at times when the child can be closely monitored and can get quickly to a toilet or potty. It is worn outdoors only when an adult can continuously supervise the child and take them to the toilet as soon as the alarm sounds. In this instance the toilet should be nearby and easily accessible.

This alarm should only be worn in places where the child's privacy is assured. It is well suited to a toilet training program at home; pants alarms have also been used in toilet training programs in other settings, for example, child care, pre-school or a specialist school. The main consideration in these situations is how the pants alarm can be used without drawing attention to the child or disturbing other children.

What to do when the pants alarm sounds

The sound of the alarm will startle the child to stop doing wee. You must then do the following:

- Immediately say your child's name and say 'toilet' firmly. Quickly disconnect the alarm if the sound is distracting for your child.
- Take your child to the toilet straight away.
- When your child is seated on the toilet disconnect the alarm if haven't already done so.
- In the beginning you may find that by the time you have reached the toilet your child has already finished doing wee. But it is still important to sit them on the toilet even if there is no wee left to do in the toilet.
- When your child has finished doing wee, put on dry pants and reconnect the alarm.
- When your child is standing away from the toilet and pants are up praise them for using the toilet and give them a reward such as a cuddle or read a story together or do another activity that the child enjoys. See page 13 in the booklet for more information about rewards.
- If your child does not do wee or a poo, let them sit on the toilet for a brief period (no longer than five minutes).
- At the end of this sitting period, if your child does not do a wee or poo, say nothing. Lead your child back to their previous activity.

Signs of progress will include:

- your child becoming more aware of doing wee.
- your child over time is able to stop doing wee at the first few rings of the alarm and is able to hold on until the toilet is reached.
- your child eventually making the connection between a full bladder feeling and the need to go to the toilet. They will then start to tell you they need to go to the toilet with a word, sign or picture.

Teaching your child what the pants alarm is for

It is always a good idea to teach your child what is going to happen to them before it happens. This can be achieved by a 'role-play' with a favourite large doll or teddy bear. Put the pants alarm on the doll and secretly set off the alarm. Then follow the steps for toileting practice. It is important to make this 'role-play' as realistic as possible, for example, use yellow food dye to colour the water in the toilet for pretend wee. This activity can be repeated at the start of each day.

Another way of teaching your child about the pants alarm is to write a story by creating a photo book with simple sentences describing your child using the pants alarm. See the tip sheet *Photo book for a story on toileting*.