

# **Mothering, mindfulness and a baby's bottom**

**Sarah J Buckley, Feb 2001**

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**How do you know when your baby wants to breast-feed? Perhaps you recognise a certain gesture or cry. Perhaps your baby is restless, thumb or finger sucking, or has a newborn's rooting behaviour, which says, "There must be a breast here somewhere". Maybe you also consider when your baby last fed, and whether she/he might have a special need for the breast because of, for example, tiredness, teething or being in an unfamiliar environment. Then there is their activity level, the weather, their routine, your routine, and probably many other factors that you instinctively take into account when you interpret your baby's signals.**

**And when you offer your breast, you will usually be getting a "yes" from your baby, but sometimes she/he will decline, or be only half interested, whether or not you are reading the signals 'correctly'.**

**However, all in all, you and your baby learn to fit together, communicating with each other and having a mutually satisfying relationship around breast feeding- not to mention saving on all the theoretical cost and activity of bottle feeding.**

**Now imagine the same process, but with a focus on what your baby produces, rather than what they take in. This is Elimination Communication (EC), also known as Elimination Timing (ET), Natural Infant Hygiene (NIH), Infant Potty Training (IPT) and Going Diaperless, among other names- where we learn to communicate with our babies about elimination -weeing and pooing.**

**Just as our babies know their own bodies and their needs for food and the breast, they also know the bodily sensations that go with the need to wee and poo, and they can- and usually do- tell us these needs. They tell us by their body language, noises (from the bottom end as well as the top!), by irritability, and sometimes by using subtler, psychic communications that result from the intimate sharing of body space between mother and baby.**

**And if we pick up these signals, we can process them just as we do with breastfeeding, taking into account other factors, to arrive at our interpretation of whether baby needs to eliminate. Then we have the opportunity to respond and offer a solution matched exactly to this baby's need. We can hold our babies in a position, and in a place that allows them to meet their body's need through eliminating, and we can also feel, as with breastfeeding, the satisfaction of consciously fulfilling our babies needs from our own resources.**

**And we will also sometimes misinterpret the signals, and/or may not be getting a clear message, just as with breastfeeding. And our babies will sometimes generously allow us to feed them- and toilet them- according to our needs, if we are going out, going to sleep etc.**

**Like breastfeeding, EC has a powerful impact on our relationships with our babies, opening up new levels of communication and understanding as well as keeping us finely tuned to our baby's wavelength. EC highlights the mutuality that is, I believe, what our babies most need from us as mothers, and which has been lost or diluted by many current child-rearing practices.**

**This is not a method of toilet training, as some have misinterpreted it- in EC, rather, it is our baby who trains us. Nor is it a way of making babies control their bladder or bowels prematurely and/or traumatically. It does, however, blow the illusion that children have no control over elimination until the toddler years, which, like so many of our modern childrearing 'facts' seems in the end to be only a culturally-based hypothesis.**

**EC is also what the global majority of mothers and babies regard as normal- very few women worldwide have the money, facilities or need for nappies.**

**I came to choose this with Maia, my fourth baby, through hearing several people talk about it over the years, and particularly through a letter in Mothering Magazine (US) some years ago which planted a seed. The author Rosie Wilde, (who set up the EC website, see below) mentioned that African women cue their babies by making a "psss" noise when they wee, and I started doing this with Maia when she was newborn. A friend pointed me towards the website when Maia was 3 months, and, inspired, I held her over the laundry tub for the first time. I made the familiar psss noise, and, to my amazement, she weed straight away- we have been doing it ever since.**

**In my daily practice of EC I have a lot of support from Emma (10), Zoe (7) and Jacob (5) who tell me how much they disliked sitting in wet or soiled nappies as babies. Some believe that we set up our society for sexual problems by encouraging our babies to dissociate, or switch off from their genital areas because of the unpleasant sensation of wearing what some have called a 'walking toilet'.**

**EC also makes a beautiful contribution to my experience of mindfulness in my mothering. Like breastfeeding, EC keeps me close to my baby, physically and psychologically, and provides very immediate feedback when I am not tuned in- eg on the computer, with Maia on my lap, reading the EC message boards-she wees on me!**

**As well as these advantages, there is obviously less washing, less waste, and a better time for Mother Earth. And it's fun! Having had 3 babies in nappies, I'm constantly delighted at her ability to communicate her needs- and to keep telling me until I get**

**it. I also get more of her skin to stroke without nappies- its especially beautiful to stroke the silky curve of her bum at sleep times- and, of course, no nappy rash.**

**How does it work? Well, I've come to the conclusion that probably ALL babies signal their elimination needs from an early age, but because we're not listening out for it, we misinterpret it as tiredness, needing to feed, or just grizzliness- especially if our baby is in a nappy, and we don't observe the connection with eliminating. With Maia, who doesn't wear nappies at home, the signal is usually being unsettled, sometimes with a bit of crying, especially if it takes me a while to 'get it' At other times, its more psychic, and I find myself heading for the laundry tub, where we usually eliminate, without really thinking. When I ignore, or delay acting on my hunch, I usually get wet!**

**I usually get the signal for poo from a few farts, or sometimes she'll even pull off the breast to tell me she needs to go- she doesn't want to sit in her own poo!**

**Knowing Maia's daily pattern is also useful- she usually poos first thing in the morning, and tends to wee frequently in the first few hours after arising. She almost always wees on awaking – it seems that most babies do this, and I think that it is the need to eliminate that actually wakens her. She also wees about 10 minutes – that's mummy minutes, not clock minutes- after breastfeeding. Some EC'ers have found that making a note of their baby's elimination pattern for a few days before they start EC is very helpful.**

**At home we mostly use the laundry tub and the 'EC position', holding her upright by her thighs, with her back resting on my belly. I also use a small sandpit-type bucket**

**('The blue bucket'- see picture) with the same position. As she gets older and heavier, I find that sitting her on the toilet in front of me also works, and I am sure that there are lots of other variations. I especially enjoy giving her wee- and mine too, if I can- directly to Mother Earth.**

**Along with the position, I cue her with my "psss" noise, and sometimes, when I think she has a need but is slow to start, I turn on the tap as well. After 3 months or so of EC, I'm getting more sure of my interpretation, and I'll sometimes persist even where she's initially reluctant, and usually she'll wee or poo in half a minute or so. However, it's a fine line, and it's vital to have cooperation, and not a battle of wills, which can sometimes develop around 'toileting'. Even using praise is not ideal- EC is more a dance of togetherness that develops, like breastfeeding, from love and respect for each other.**

**On a practical level, I use nappies when we are out and about, and EC as much as I can, but I don't expect to be perfect in these- or any- circumstances. I talk to Maia, and when we miss a wee, it's just "Oh well, missed that one". Some ECers use nappies at home, which is an option for those who don't like to be weed on- Zoe, 7yo, reminds me that being weed on is a blessing from Maia. Using nappies also**

**gives less clarity, and less motivation. I have found that Maia and I caught on much more quickly without nappies.**

**We use toilets, or take the ‘blue bucket’ in the car- recently I’ve tried a 2L ice-cream container with a sealable lid. (NB she doesn’t actually ‘sit’ on these containers- I hold her weight). On hot days, I just lay a nappy on the car seat. If it’s not convenient to stop, I’ll say to her “Oh Maia, you’ll have to wee in the nappy, and I’ll change it as soon as we stop.”**

**Maia doesn’t like to be disturbed at night, so I lie her on a bunny rug and just let her wee. I change this whenever I wake up, and I find that, like the daytime, she usually wees on awaking, and then feeds. Knowing this pattern, I have been also wrapping a nappy loosely around her bum, which again I change when wet. Other EC babies seem to like to be toileted at night, which can involve just a bucket by the bed. Other babies are happy to be taken to the sink or toilet, reportedly without awaking.**

**As with most aspects of parenting, more rewards come with persistence and time. Older EC babies will usually begin to use the cueing noise themselves. Some ECers have taught their babies sign language to hasten this process. When EC babies become mobile, they may head for their potty or whatever when they need to eliminate. Toilet training becomes unnecessary, because EC babies have never learned to ignore their elimination needs.**

**As I hope I’ve conveyed, communication is what EC is all about. I highly recommend Rosie’s FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the EC website, which tell of her experiences using EC along with lots of communication with her son, now 3. This site also has an email list/ message board, which is invaluable for ongoing support, as well as for the extensive archives.**

**Another great site is Ingrid Bauer’s Natural Infant Hygiene- she has just published the book Diaper Free- The Gentle Wisdom of Natural Infant Hygiene, in Canada, which I have ordered - details below. The other book is Laurie Boucke’s Infant Potty Training-A Gentle and Primeval Method Adapted to Modern Living, which also has its own site- all of these are linked, and these two authors feature often in the email list with helpful advice.**

**In our society, mothering is often seen as a chore- a time in our lives when we are ‘brain dead’, and unproductive. Dealing with our children’s elimination products is perceived as particularly onerous, and big business has capitalised on this, making millions of dollars-and tonnes of waste-by manufacturing disposable nappies. These attitudes sadden me deeply- how awful for our children, too, to be seen as the cause of bad feelings and unsanitary waste.**

**There is, however, a radically different point of view, shared by many in other cultures, that sees mothering as a women’s spiritual practice, and our babies as our**

teachers. We have the opportunity in mothering, as never before, to practice devotion, selflessness and unconditional love, and all under conditions of 'deprivation'. Our brains, or thinking capacities, may (or may not) be diminished, but our hearts and instincts can bloom, and we can practice the mindfulness that allows us to be totally in the present, in love, with our babies and children, which is where they are.

**Blessed be the babies.**

## Websites

Rosie's Elimination Communication Page

<http://www.freeyellow.com/members4/seafish/index.html>

Ingrid Bauer's Natural Infant Hygiene site

<http://www.natural-wisdom.com>

Jana Kutarna's "Did You Say Without Diapers?" page

<http://trick.fig.org/jana/child/diaperless.html>

Scott Noelle's article (Continuum Concept- EC with a toddler)

<http://www.teleport.com/~noelles/misc/goingdiaperless.html>

Johnson Family Infant Potty Training Page

<http://www.users.uswest.net/~ptlfhb/training.html>

Trickle Treat---Laurie Boucke (Info About Her Book) <http://www.White-Boucke.com/ifpt.html>

Natec's ET article, excerpt from her booklet

<http://www3.parentsplace.com/readroom/articles/elimination1.html>

(The 3 is not a misprint)

## Books

Infant Potty Training- A Gentle and Primeval Method Adapted to Modern Living.

Laurie Boucke, 2000 White-Boucke Publishing

Box 400, Lafayette, CO 80026, USA.

Email: [laurieb@white-boucke.com](mailto:laurieb@white-boucke.com)

Elimination Timing by Natec. HCR2 Box 6838, Keaau, HI 96749, USA. \$6 US

each.[emailnatec@interpac.net](mailto:emailnatec@interpac.net)

Diaper Free!: The Gentle Wisdom of Natural Infant Hygiene, by Ingrid Bauer 2001

Available from Natural Wisdom Press: 115 Forest Ridge Road, Saltspring Island,

BC, V8K 1W4 CANADA

Email: [instinct@saltspring.com](mailto:instinct@saltspring.com)