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The Diaper-Free Baby

THE NATURAL TOILET TRAINING ALTERNATIVE

Christine Gross-Loh

the DIAPER-FREE BABY

The Natural Toilet Training Alternative

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**This book is dedicated to my two little
diaper-free babies, Benjamin and Daniel,
who, from the moment of birth,
opened my heart to all that babies
and children have to say to us.**

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FOREWORD

By Melinda Rothstein and Rachel Milgroom, cofounders of DiaperFreeBaby™

We both entered motherhood expecting to change years of diapers, just like every parent we had ever known. Melinda thought of taking her one-week-old son to the bathroom when she knew he was about to go, but dismissed it immediately as ridiculous because she'd never known anyone who did it. Rachel was dedicated to the idea that a child should be helped to learn to use the toilet at a young age but thought that meant starting at around a year old and that anything younger would be impossible and incredibly messy. Only after being encouraged by other parents did we start to consider an alternative to full-time diapering.

What these other parents told us is this: Our babies are born ready to communicate that they need to use the potty, and the time spent taking a baby to the potty can be fun. Half of the world's children are out of diapers by the end of their first year, yet many of the children in American society remain in diapers well into their third and fourth years. We learned that it is possible to practice elimination communication (EC) regardless of differences in work schedule or parenting style—from a few times per week to many times per day, one caregiver to many, starting at birth or starting later in the first year. We came to understand that parents in an exclusively diapering culture need assistance as they shift their mindsets about elimination and diapering.

Once we understood that babies are aware of their elimination needs and have ways of communicating those needs, it made perfect sense to us to help them use the potty. Both of us started our elimination communication journey with our children at approximately the same time as Christine did with her second son, Daniel. We influenced each other's choices and provided support to each other as we learned. Through frequent contact via e-mail with other families we learned practical day-to-day tips and started a local playgroup for families practicing EC. From these relationships we learned about our infants' innate intelligence and increased our ability to understand when they were communicating their needs.

At the time, none of us had any idea how much EC was going to add to our lives. We definitely had no inkling that we'd be so enriched by it that we'd become involved in the effort to publicize the practice to parents everywhere. The international EC support organization, DiaperFreeBaby™, was born out of our desire to help other families meet for support and sharing. We knew that families would be happy to have a way to connect with each other, but we were completely surprised by the level of international media interest.

This growing interest makes it clear that it is time for Christine's book, and we're thrilled that so many parents will now have the opportunity to explore EC for their families. Christine is the perfect person to write this book, as she has both the loving perspective of an EC parent and the professional skill to present the information. From our first playgroup with Christine, her perspectives on elimination communication and parenting, as well as her own gentle nature, have been indispensable

to us personally and to the parenting community as a whole. She has been totally committed to the social movement that has occurred since we started DiaperFreeBaby support groups, including the exponential growth of the New York City DiaperFreeBaby group that she started. Now she has written a book that is sure to inspire you to start practicing EC if you have not already begun.

Christine expertly shares real stories as well as practical tips and guidance for integrating EC in your family life. We hope that you will view this book as a DiaperFreeBaby meeting in your pocket and hope it will enrich your life as well.

What Is EC, and Why Should I Do It with My Baby?

Diapers. We're so used to thinking of them as the ultimate symbol of babyhood that the thought of a baby without diapers seems awfully strange. It's practically a rite of passage for parents to get their toddlers and preschoolers out of diapers. Advice abounds on getting your two-or three-year-old to ditch those diapers and begin to learn to go in a potty or toilet. The current trend is to let your child wait until he is "ready," and as a result, many parents find themselves involved in power struggles with their toddlers and preschoolers day after day because they missed crucial earlier windows of opportunity. The average toilet training age in the United States is now at an all-time high at around three years old. It makes sense, actually, that after a couple of years eliminating exclusively in diapers, a child will be inclined to hang on to them as long as he can. How odd it is, in fact, that our society expects a child to change gears midstream and suddenly stop using the diaper as a toilet when he has been doing so all his life!

Believe it or not, your child was not born wanting to go to the bathroom in a diaper. Like other mammals, human babies are born with the instinct not to soil themselves. It is not a natural or pleasant feeling for them to sit in their own waste; they are born aware of the sensation of going to the bathroom. Even the tiniest newborn will give off signs before and while she goes to the bathroom. This book is going to teach you how to read those signs, how to respond to them, and how to engage in a process of joyful communication with your baby at a pace that feels right for your family, whether this means once a day or more often. Through "elimination communication," or EC, your baby will benefit as you help her retain her bodily awareness and assist her with a basic biological need. The benefit for you? In addition to parenting a happier baby, you're likely to need fewer diapers overall—great for your wallet and for the environment!

For those who have spent time with older babies or toddlers who seem oblivious to a dirty diaper, the idea that they are born with the instinct not to soil themselves may seem preposterous. Being sprayed by newborn pee and poop as soon as a diaper comes off *during* diaper changes are a common occurrence throughout a baby's first weeks (another common rite of passage for most parents), but this happens less and less often as the baby grows older. Why? By putting our children in diapers and changing them only *after* they have gone, we condition our babies to use the diaper itself as a toilet!

Some people might think, so what? Isn't diapering a part of babyhood? Aren't diapers a sign of progress, modernity, and affluence? Perhaps that would be so if we did not expect our little ones to stop using diapers at some point in the first few years of their lives. Since this is the case, many parents are faced with double work: training a child to go to the bathroom in a diaper, and then training her to stop doing that and use a toilet instead! This means twice as much work for parents and twice as much adjustment for the child. The later this gets—especially if you're waiting for all the

signs of “readiness” described by conventional toilet training experts—the more of an adjustment it can be for your child, and the more diaper changes, diapers, and diapering accessories you’ve gone through in the meantime. (If your child is training around age three, this means up to nine thousand diaper changes and diapers, over three thousand dollars in diapers alone [not to mention wipes and other accessories], and according to a *New York Times* article on elimination communication, a contribution to the twenty-two billion single-use, disposable diapers in U.S. landfills per year, to be exact!)

Of course, many children sail through conventional potty training just fine. But there are countless others who have trouble recognizing which muscles to use to hold or release pee or who just find it physically and emotionally difficult to let go of the diaper they have been used to all their lives. Even after some children become aware of the elimination sensation, they are still so accustomed to diapers that they actually request a diaper to put on before they go to the bathroom! Others simply take a long time to train, and their parents resort to pleading, bribes, stickers, M&Ms, videos, musical potties, and other such gimmicks. Still other children suffer from excruciating diaper rash, fiercely resist diaper changes, or otherwise find diapering to be an unpleasant experience the whole way through. They develop negative associations with anything having to do with diapering and elimination itself.

You’re probably reading this book because you hope to avoid these scenarios, and EC fits in with your parenting philosophy and resonates with you for financial, environmental, or personal reasons. Read on to learn more about EC and why I recommend you consider practicing it with your baby.

ELIMINATION COMMUNICATION: A GENTLE ALTERNATIVE

Imagine what it would be like if your baby was so accustomed to the concept of using a toilet as, well, a toilet, that when it did come time to become completely toilet-independent, she took the process completely for granted, so that the transition was utterly smooth. Imagine if this toilet independence came about without bribes, struggles, resistance, or tantrums and was instead a natural, completely gentle, noncoercive process that your baby was fully participating in, so that as an infant, she would be able to let you know when she had to go to the bathroom, and by the time she was walking, she could toddle over to the toilet by herself just like she might toddle over to the kitchen if she were hungry. That’s what happens in many families who practice EC with their babies.



EC is a lost art in our society. It is still practiced throughout the world, mostly in countries where disposable diapers are considered a luxury if they are available at all. In fact, there are many people out there who think that we are odd for relying on diapers so much. It's really diapers that are the new phenomenon—not EC. In the United States, some version of early potty training was practiced up until disposable diaper use became more widespread in the 1960s and '70s. Before this time, most children were out of diapers by age two, if not earlier. EC is still practiced in at least seventy-five countries, including China, India, Greenland, and Russia, and in many other parts of Africa, South America, and Asia. Because the children from many of these cultures have never had to lose the bodily awareness they were born with—mothers or caregivers simply hold babies away from them when they sense they need to go—most of them are toilet-independent incredibly early from our society's point of view. One study states that 50 percent of the world's children are toilet trained by the age of one. Many internationally adopting parents are “startled” to find that their babies arrive already able to use the toilet, according to the *New York Times*. With statistics like these, the idea that toilet training shouldn't *begin* until age two or three, when the child meets the conditions of an arbitrary checklist for “readiness,” seems more and more absurd.

But it's common for parents to be skeptical even in the face of all this evidence. Even if EC works and children are physically and emotionally capable of doing this, it still sounds utterly overwhelming for new parents in our society. We live in homes with carpets, we're constantly on the go, parents go back to work when babies are merely weeks old, and children are often in the care of nannies or day-care providers or relatives. How can EC really work in a modern Western society such as ours?

I'm here to say that EC can be accomplished. If EC is something you'd like to try, you are about to hear from many parents just like you who have done it with great success. This book is filled with their reassuring voices and the rich variety of their personal experiences. You'll learn how to practice EC in the way that is best for your family situation and preferences, with plenty of options to make it work for anyone in any situation. Whether you are a stay-at-home mom or dad or you are separated from your baby for long hours because of work, whether you use cloth diapers or disposable ones, whether you're starting with a tiny newborn or are coming to this with a baby who is six months, ten months, or well over a year old, there are guidelines in this book that will work for you.

EC HISTORY AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Although parents in our society have easy access to diapers and use them liberally with their babies and toddlers, this isn't the case for everyone. In much of the world, elimination communication is still the norm, as it always has been. Some of the most ardent advocates of EC have been influenced and inspired by time spent in a country where EC is the cultural norm.

Laurie Boucke, Linda Penn (Natec), and Ingrid Bauer all came to EC through their contacts with other cultures and went on to write on the subject for Western audiences. Bauer refers to infant pottying as “Natural Infant Hygiene” (NIH) and also coined the term *elimination communication*. Boucke, who has written several books, including *Infant Potty Training*, and is coauthoring several forthcoming medical studies on EC, says, “For years, I've emphasized that it's really important for parents to be presented with more than one option so they can make an informed decision” about whether to use diapers exclusively or to learn to recognize baby's elimination signals and assist her in using a potty or toilet.

EC became more well known through such advocacy, but only a relatively small group of Western parents were familiar with the concept. Most parents who embraced EC were drawn to it because of its close connection with attachment parenting principles.

Recently, however, the word has been spreading rapidly. Growing numbers of parents have been gathering in support groups to assist each other in the practice of EC. These support groups are so inspiring! In addition to groups people have started on their own, many groups have been formed under the umbrella of a wonderful nonprofit organization called DiaperFreeBaby. Founded in 2004 by two of my close friends, Melinda Rothstein and Rachel Milgroom, DiaperFreeBaby's membership has just ballooned. At the end of its second year there were support groups or practicing families in nearly every state as well as in fourteen countries, and growth has continued to be exponential thanks to sustained public and media interest in EC.

I myself participated in one of the first EC support groups with Melinda, Rachel, and a few other friends. During our monthly meetings, we all came together with our babies and shared tips, which was a really great experience for us. It became obvious that parents all over the country who sought EC guidance would love to share their experiences with each other, and thanks to Melinda and Rachel's dream of bringing this camaraderie to parents everywhere, DiaperFreeBaby was born.

I am now a Mentor for my local support group. Mentors bring parents together in a forum where they can talk to each other about the daily practice of EC. This sort of forum is so important when you are practicing something that isn't all that commonly done. I urge you to go to a local meeting if you can. You will see adorable babies gently being assisted to use the potty; and you will also be introduced to real EC'ing gear, such as portable potties, split crotch pants, tiny training pants, and so forth—all designed to make EC'ing easier for parents in our society. Best of all, however, you will meet other parents like yourself.

But if you are not near an active support group or just want more guidance at home, this book was written just for you. I encourage you to think of it as your own portable support group, filled with the voices of many parents at all stages of the EC journey! And, of course, I hope that my own story will serve as inspiration to you as well.

MY JOURNEY TO EC

Chances are you're reading this book because you've heard the media buzz about all these parents taking their babies to the potty. Maybe you think it's far-fetched but are intrigued and wondering if this is something you can really do.

I know how it feels. I was also one of those intrigued but doubtful parents when I first learned about EC while expecting my first son, Benjamin. Like most people who use diapers, my primary concern was to get the most absorbent diapers I could find—diapers that could withstand several hours without leaking. I'd heard about diaper changes, and I dreaded them. When I heard that there were parents out there who practiced something called "elimination communication," I was, frankly, shocked. The very notion that a tiny baby could use the potty seemed ludicrous and completely odd to me, even though I myself had actually watched three-month-old infants being pottied when I was studying abroad! That is how ingrained the idea that toilet learning is reserved for two-to three-year-olds is in our society. I ignored the newborn spray, tried to get through those diaper changes, and

stocked my bulging diaper bag with tons of diapers and wipes whenever I was on the go.

Yet over time I found that I was aware of my baby's elimination patterns. I realized that as he grew older, he often went hours in the afternoon with a dry diaper. I observed that he would wet more frequently in the mornings, and that he was very obvious about when he was having a bowel movement. Even so, it really didn't occur to me to put him on the potty at those times even though I knew about EC. I'm not sure why not, except that maybe in my mind, I saw it as something that would be totally time-consuming and impractical, and I knew absolutely no one who was doing it. In the end it was my child himself who led me to EC.

When Benjamin was just over a year old, my mother (who grew up in Korea) bought him a potty. My first reaction was complete indignation! I thought I, a hip, modern parent, knew better than she, and that "better" now meant waiting until he was two or three, not starting with a preverbal thirteen-month-old! I even thought that early pottying could be harmful somehow. But before returning the potty to my mom, I decided to sit little Benjamin on it just for fun, because it seemed so cute, and he was certainly fascinated. Well, he peed in the potty right away!

I was astounded! And even more astounded when he repeated this every time I sat him on it throughout that day and the next. I began to realize that he had been waiting for me to understand that he wanted to go to the bathroom outside of a diaper. He had been watching all of us using toilets and was eager to join in. I finally tapped into all the EC resources I'd taken note of, adapted those methods for my "late-start" EC'ing baby, found some support online, and within a week or two, he was completely out of diapers.

Now, Benjamin's story is a bit unusual. It's rare for a child to retain that bodily awareness for so long, and I often hesitate to share this story because of how young Benjamin was when he "graduated" (became completely toilet-independent with no "misses"—EC-speak for accidents). While getting out of diapers earlier than the U.S. average is something that happens with a lot of EC'ed children, it's not the main point of EC at all, and I wouldn't want parents to embark on this journey with that primary goal. You see, this method is not about getting your baby potty trained sooner than anyone else's child. It's about the process of communication, not the result. There's no time frame, no deadline as to when your child should be fully out of diapers.



My son Daniel, one year old, on the toilet

But I do share this story with people because it highlights a couple of things: children can be ready much earlier than we think; EC can totally enhance their self-esteem and sense of independence.

by allowing them to use a toilet when they are so young and imitative (rather than when they are going through the resistant and strong-willed twos); and because it really shows that, contrary to popular belief, early pottyng doesn't mean that it will be a messy, drawn-out, and stressful experience. The gentle principles of EC made for the most seamless, beautifully bonding toileting experience I could ever have hoped to have with my toddler!

With my second son, Daniel, we started practicing EC when he was around three weeks old. Now the important thing I like to point out about my experience with him is that even if you begin with a tiny baby, this doesn't mean you're going to be a slave to his signals and whims to use the toilet all the time. EC turns this mentality on its head; recognizing your child's need to go to the bathroom is truly no different from recognizing his sleep or hunger cues, as you're going to learn from reading this book. It's no different from what any loving and attentive parent would do to try to figure out what his or her baby is communicating.

Because Daniel had health issues during part of his infancy, I made a conscious decision to put EC on the back burner with him and practice it only occasionally. Thus, we did it very part-time—as little as once a week for the first few months of his life. Later we ramped up to catching poops only, with just an occasional pee, and finally practiced it more full-time when he was a bit older. He graduated at around seventeen months. Even following EC part-time, I like to point out, results in a baby who is not completely diaper trained and who recognizes that you are going to assist him with his desire not to sit in his own waste. You are still engaging in the important process of EC—communication—with your baby. He has the opportunity to retain his awareness of the muscles that control his elimination and the ability to let you know when he has to go.

Even with just my own two sons, I've had a real variety of EC experiences: early-start, late-start, full-time, part-time. Between my story and those of the many inspiring parents featured in this book, I am certain that you will find something that works for your family.

INTRODUCING THE THREE TRACKS

Because I've found that so many parents practice EC to varying degrees, I've decided to introduce the concept of three tracks, which I'll be referring to throughout the book: full-time EC, part-time EC, and occasional EC. You will probably find that one of these approaches initially appeals to you more than the others, but they are not hard and fast categories. Most EC'ers fluctuate between categories all the time without even consciously thinking about it. I've spelled the tracks out explicitly in hopes that these concepts will help you navigate this book more smoothly.

Full-time EC'ers, in general, start following EC soon after birth (although you can certainly start practicing EC full-time at any stage of your child's infancy or early toddlerhood). Usually there is at least one parent or primary caregiver present with the baby at all times, and the baby is often worn in a sling during the early months. Full-time EC'ers practice EC as much as they can throughout the day and night, aiming to provide their baby with the opportunity to go to the bathroom as many times as they think he needs. Full-time EC'ers, like all EC'ers, are usually most comfortable first practicing EC at home. Over time, they may choose to practice it out of the house as well, although there are plenty of families who make a point to practice EC only when they are near home. The babies of full-time EC'ers are often diaper-free early on (if they ever wear diapers at all). This doesn't mean that their parents catch every pee or never encounter a wet training pant. However, the intensive nature of

full-time EC means that parents will usually get to a point pretty early on when they are so in tune with their babies that they catch most pees and all poops, with very few misses. It becomes as second nature to them as noticing when their baby is hungry or sleepy.

Part-time EC'ers catch whatever they are able to, but don't practice EC all the time. They might focus on EC during the mornings, for instance, when they are able to spend uninterrupted time with their baby, or for an hour or two in the evening. They might be catching all of their baby's bowel movements; in fact, quite a few EC'ers start with bowel movements because they are so predictable and it is so rewarding for parent and baby not to clean a poopy bottom and diaper. There are even EC'ers who focus only on bowel movements during most of infancy, choosing to approach pees later when their child is older.

Occasional EC'ers practice EC only occasionally. This could mean catching as little as one pee a day, or even less often. It can even mean offering the baby a chance to use the potty at a time when the diaper is going to be off anyway—during a diaper change, for instance, or right before bath time. Occasional EC'ers may also use diapers nearly all the time without even using a potty, but make an effort to cue their baby, to recognize his signals, and to keep communicating with him about elimination even if it is happening in a diaper. If they change his diaper pretty quickly afterward so that he doesn't have to sit in a dirty diaper, and if they talk to him about the process as much as possible, there is a really good chance that the baby will be able to retain his bodily awareness of elimination, which will result in a smoother transition to being diaper-free later in infancy or toddlerhood, when there are renewed opportunities to practice EC in other ways.

As this book will show you, EC can be as simple as offering your baby a chance to use the toilet once a day, when her diaper happens to be off, or as intensive as aiming to catch a majority of your baby's output. There is a huge range of experiences out there that qualify as elimination communication. What they all have in common is the parents' desire to connect with their baby, to understand what their baby is communicating, and to show their baby that they are there to lovingly and gently help him meet his needs. Remember that the wonderful thing about EC is that it offers you flexibility depending on what suits your and your baby's needs best. You don't have to commit to one track rather than the other—just go with the flow. As you'll see, there are a variety of EC'ing parents out there whose experiences are sure to resonate with you.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

I encounter a range of reactions when people find out that my little ones were in underwear when they were so young. Although most people are intrigued and amazed, they are also often skeptical that EC could ever work for their own families. Below, I've listed and addressed the most commonly cited reasons why parents believe the EC lifestyle won't work for them.

1. "I think it's training the parent, not the child."

EC'ers hear this a lot. If you think that learning to tell when your baby is hungry or sleepy is "training" you, then yes, learning to read your baby's cues that she needs to go to the bathroom could also be considered parent training. However, I prefer to emphasize that it's not about training at all. EC is not toilet training the way you train an older child to use the toilet. It's engaging in

communication and becoming in tune with your wonderful baby by responding to a basic need. There's nothing negative about being "trained" in this way. Above all else, realize that focusing on "training" leads us away from what EC is really about. EC is not so much about the *result* (a toilet-independent child) as it is about the *process* of communication.

2. "Wouldn't it just be easier for my child to train on his own when he is older?"

Of course, all children eventually become toilet-independent as older toddlers or preschoolers, and their joy and pride in this is a wonderful thing to see. But EC'ed babies have the opportunity to experience the independence of fully understanding their bodies well before that, and the transition to the toilet is often smoother for children who have never been exclusively diaper-reliant. If you have ever seen an eight-month-old signal that she has to use the toilet, or a one-year-old run over to a potty and use it on his own while delighting in the whole process, you will have no doubt that EC'ed children experience a unique feeling of self-sufficiency and self-awareness.

3. "I don't want a mess all over my house—isn't EC difficult to do in Western society?"

Some parents will make changes to their house—taking up the rugs temporarily, perhaps focusing on EC only when they happen to be in one room, and so on. The initial learning period does not last very long. As you and your baby learn to connect, you will have fewer misses with which to deal. Besides, you'd likely have misses if you were conventionally toilet training a child anyway. Remember, you can always use diapers as backup or even full-time if it helps you feel more relaxed. Plenty of parents follow EC without going completely diaper-free.

4. "Isn't EC kind of weird—like you're hovering over your child, waiting for her to pee or poop?"

About the hovering, many parents are in close proximity to their newborn babies. It's a misconception that EC parents spend all their time hovering and waiting for the next pee or poop. Parents quickly pick up on their baby's elimination patterns just as they pick up on their baby's need to eat or sleep. They don't have to think about it all the time. In addition, parents often find that their EC'ed babies often begin consolidating their pees and poops and eliminate less frequently than an exclusively diapered baby.

There are certainly new challenges to EC'ing a mobile baby. If you have a crawling, exploring, older baby, it can be difficult to keep her close by no matter how hard you try. But I—like many EC'ing parents—found that being so in tune with my baby meant that sometimes I just "knew" he had to go to the bathroom even if I was in another room. That is the nature of the awareness you cultivate during this journey.

5. "Why should my baby have to communicate her elimination? She's just a baby. Why can't I just let her relax and use a diaper?"

Once you recognize that your baby was born with the innate awareness not to soil her own diaper,

you'll realize that she is not being forced to communicate or do anything beyond her natural abilities. In fact, by ignoring a baby's elimination signals, we're asking her to tune out a natural instinct and instead endure something she likely finds unpleasant. EC'ed babies are so comfortable going to the bathroom—they often seem to take it very much for granted—that it's quite obvious we're not asking anything of a baby by engaging in EC. Besides, what could be more comfortable and easy for a baby than going diaper-free?



Siblings love to help out. Here, my son Benjamin helps hold Daniel up on the potty.

6. “I have older children to take care of too.”

Older children get used to interruptions, and they quickly learn that you are as present for them as you can be even while feeding or changing a baby. Older brothers and sisters can also be intuitive and communicative with their younger siblings, even more so than their parents! I recall the many times, when I wasn't being perceptive, that Benjamin would let me know that baby Daniel had to go to the bathroom. Brothers and sisters are also great models; babies learn so much from watching their siblings use the toilet. Finally, the enhanced communication your EC'ed baby experiences with you is something your children will experience between one another as well.

7. “I work outside the home.”

EC is about communication, and anyone can learn to communicate with a child. If your partner, relatives, or caregiver are reluctant to try EC because they don't understand it, give them some time. Your baby may also figure out how to communicate to her caregiver as she gets older. If you find that your baby is only going to be EC'ed when you are around, that's fine too; she can switch between diapers and the potty very easily, just as babies can learn to use both the breast and the bottle.

8. “I am too overwhelmed.”

EC can be practiced part-time, just as I did with Daniel during his infancy. At those times, my goal was simply to be vigilant and to help Daniel retain his bodily awareness by changing him as soon as he went, verbally acknowledging every elimination that I was aware of (even if I couldn't get him to

potty on time), and practicing EC whenever I could without stressing out when I couldn't. The key is to focus on communication; the actual act of "catching" is less important than communicating and acknowledging what your child is doing. I often suggest to people just to try it for a half-hour each day; let your baby go bare-bottomed while lying on a soft waterproof pad or some cloth diapers. Or try putting your baby on the potty before bath time and make it a fun ritual. Even carried out part-time, EC makes for a beautiful bonding experience.

9. "We live in a city" or "We're always on the go."

Being an urban EC'er has its challenges, of course, but it's easier in other ways as well. You just have to adjust your thinking. It's not a big deal to pop a little lightweight plastic bowl in your diaper bag; after all, there's plenty of room if you're not using as many diapers. Also, just as a parent might loosely plan the day around feeding or nap schedules, once you're aware of your baby's elimination patterns you will develop an awareness of the optimal times for your outings. Many parents also find that they just rely on diapers more when life gets hectic or when they're going out, and that's totally fine too.

10. "I've decided to try it, and it's just not working—we have so many misses. I'm just not in tune with my baby."

Elimination communication used to be practiced throughout every society, and being surrounded by support and guidance was a given. It's just not as common today. This is why seeking out support—whether online, through a local DiaperFreeBaby support group, or by reading this book—is essential to success. Feeling discouraged from time to time is as common among EC'ers as it is among parents of older kids who are being conventionally toilet trained. Throughout the book, for each developmental stage, I will discuss how to approach the times when you feel out of sync with your child.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Each chapter in this book will discuss a specific stage of development pertaining to EC. Although every chapter contributes to an overall sense of what EC is about and how it works for babies and young toddlers, if, for instance, you have a six-month-old and are reading this book for the first time, you may certainly skip directly to the chapter on mid-infancy. I'll repeat some of the most crucial information—how to cue, what your child's signals are, the logistics of doing EC at nighttime or on the go, etc.—to help you make sense of new issues that may arise as your child gets older. (For instance, you'll find that applying EC on the go with a newborn is different from practicing it with a walking, talking toddler. Each chapter will take into account your child's developmental stage.)

In the next chapter, "Gathering Support and Making the Leap," I briefly discuss some of the obstacles you might encounter as you prepare to practice EC with your baby. Just picking up this book is a wonderful sign that you are open to the possibilities of this method. Nevertheless, EC is so counter to the potty training dogma of the last several decades that you may find you need a bit more convincing to actually make the leap to practice EC. On the other hand, you yourself may be enthusiastic to get started, but you may have to convince a skeptical partner, relative, caregiver, or

friend of the merits of this method. Take it from me; we've all been there, and this chapter will bolster your resolve.

In chapter 3, "Getting Ready to EC: Gear and Other Fun Stuff," you'll learn all about EC'ers' favorite items to help make infant pottying go smoothly. There is special clothing such as split-crotch pants, wool leggings to keep little legs cozy, and baby-sized training pants and underwear. I will introduce you to soft waterproof pads to spread out under your diaper-free baby when she's playing or sleeping, special potties just the perfect size for your infant, and other equipment that helps when you're out and about. I also discuss, in some detail, baby carriers and cloth diapers. You don't have to use either, but many parents do find them useful. Carrying your baby close to your body, especially at the start, helps you learn his elimination patterns. Coverless cloth diapers used on occasion can aid in providing a measure of "diaper-free" time for your baby, helping her retain her awareness of when she is going to the bathroom.

In chapter 4, "Newborn Bliss: Getting to Know Your Baby, Getting Started on EC," I'll focus on babies aged birth to three months and discuss how to connect with your newborn baby. I'll tell you how to get started, cover the typical experiences many parents go through, and teach you all the best EC'ing positions for a newborn. You'll hear many parents' strategies for balancing life with a newborn while helping to address your baby's elimination needs.

In chapter 5, "EC'ing During Middle Infancy: Smooth Sailing," we're going to look at EC'ing a baby who is in middle infancy, which roughly covers ages three to eight months, or until baby really starts to become mobile. Whether you're just starting out or continuing on from the newborn stage, you'll learn about the basics of EC'ing during middle infancy. These babies are able to hold their heads up and sit on their own, which makes this a smooth and predictable time as babies' patterns become clearer and they are much more responsive and communicative. We'll talk about learning to read your baby's signals and introducing the potty or toilet. And of course there's plenty of information on EC'ing at night, on the go, or while working out of the home.

Chapter 6, "The Joys of EC'ing Your Mobile Baby," discusses EC'ing an older baby (roughly eight to twelve months) who is mobile and crawling, maybe even starting to walk and talk. You'll encounter new challenges at this time, whether you're continuing on or just getting started. Your baby is so excited by all his new developmental changes that he may be more distracted, but learning to walk and talk also introduces exciting opportunities for your child to take even more initiative with EC. Parents will tell you their strategies for keeping things going in a low-key, supportive, and loving way.

If you've got a one-year-old, you'll find chapter 7, "EC'ing Your Toddler," full of information you can use. It's so much fun at this age—your child is enthusiastic, loves to imitate adults, and is generally not going to be resistant in the way an older child might be. Whether you're just starting now or are continuing on from before, I'll discuss how to understand and work with your child, and how to lovingly keep him on the EC track even when he is so immersed in exploring and playing that he doesn't want to stop to go to the bathroom. You'll read lots of strategies for helping your child become more toilet-independent and involved in his own success.

Chapter 8, "Final Hurdles and Graduation," shows you how many different families have dealt creatively with challenges such as toddler potty pauses as they approached "graduation," or toilet independence.

In the last chapter, “If Your Situation Is a Little Different,” you’ll hear from parents of preterm babies, multiples, and babies with special needs, whose unique situations might not have been covered in the previous chapters. I’ll also briefly discuss how the gentle principles of EC can be adapted to aid toilet training a child of any age, including children older than eighteen months.

Gathering Support and Making the Leap

So you've heard about infants using the potty and think it's a really interesting idea, but you're not completely sure it's for you. You're not alone. I've met many parents who heard about EC just once, perhaps from a friend or through a magazine or newspaper article, and instantly decided this was something that they wanted to try; it simply resonated with them. For every parent who is this enthusiastic and certain from the start, however, there is another who is intrigued but hesitant to make the leap.

Feeling reluctant is a very understandable reaction. After all, we are surrounded by dictators not "rush" or "pressure" our children, and are told not to even consider introducing our children to the toilet until they are much older. We even have the luxury of purchasing large-sized disposable diapers so that our children can take all the time in the world to potty train. Although these cultural messages may lead us to fear making a mistake unless we follow standard toilet training rules to the letter, they are actually teaching us to ignore our own child's natural timetable. (You may recall, even when my older son's readiness was positively staring me in the face, I still hesitated because I had absorbed the cultural message that he was far too young by our society's standards.) Still others simply may not believe it is something a baby is even physically capable of, or they simply can't comprehend how the mechanism of EC works with a young, preverbal baby.

The very first thing to remember about EC, and something you'll hear me mention a lot, is that it is not about *toilet training* in the most commonly held view of the term. The reason many parents who practice EC dislike the word *training* in association with what they do is that this term has connotations that lead us away from the core of EC. EC is about communication, about gently getting in harmony with your baby, and proceeding at a pace that feels right for all of you. It's about engaging in a give-and-take on a daily basis and honing those instincts (the same instincts that allow you to sense when your baby is hungry, tired, or overstimulated) that make parenting your own unique baby so rewarding. There's nothing coercive, forced, or pressured about EC. You're not involved in a power struggle with a toddler or preschooler who is firmly attached to her diaper. It's not a race to get your baby out of diapers by a certain age. There are no expectations, except that you remain open to what your little one is saying to you. Most of all, it's about learning and following your baby's instinctive readiness signals—the ones she was born with.

Some parents may feel convinced that EC is good for parent and baby but are unable to imagine adding any further complications to their already-busy lives with an infant. In particular, the term *diaper-free baby* can be misleading to some people. I've met parents who were hesitant to embark on EC because they thought that this required their child to actually be completely free of diapers, and they couldn't fathom the kind of extra work this might take. I'm always quick to reassure them that

being “diaper-free” has a much broader meaning than just going diaperless. Sure, many EC’ing parents find that they naturally evolve toward a stage where having their young baby or toddler in underwear or training pants rather than in diapers makes more sense; they may be very much in tune and having few misses, or they may simply find that going diaper-free really facilitates the communication that is the cornerstone of EC. This is, however, not at all a prerequisite in any way. I really like how I’ve heard some experienced EC’ing parents define what “diaper-free” means to them: freedom from an exclusive reliance on diapers. It’s simply about knowing that you are not bound to diapers and that choosing to exclusively diaper your baby is not an inevitable part of parenting a new baby. If you choose to go diaper-free, it means you are making a choice about how much you wish to be dependent upon diapers. You’re following an easy rhythm that you and your baby establish between yourselves. This may mean that you go through some phases when you use many diapers a day, and others when you use very few if any of them. There’s certainly no expectation or requirement to be diaperless all the time.

Some parents simply may not believe that EC is possible or they may not understand how it works. Everything we as a society have been taught in the last few decades by doctors, books, and even the disposable-diaper industry would certainly lead many parents to believe that babies have absolutely no sphincter control or awareness of elimination, and that minimal control doesn’t even kick in until they are well past infancy. Even if you believe that babies are physically capable of some control over their elimination (and even if their instinctive desire not to soil themselves makes sense to you), the process by which parent and child get in sync through nonverbal cues, body language, and intuition might seem incomprehensible. If you find yourself having these sorts of doubts, it may help to seek out an EC’ing parent or DiaperFreeBaby group near you. There’s nothing like an actual demonstration to show you how it all comes together. I’ve had nothing but positive, interested reactions from people who have happened to witness my own babies being EC’ed. In truth, seeing EC in action has a greater impact than just hearing or reading about it.

If you find you are interested and nearly convinced but still teetering on the edge, I think the solution is simple. Just give it a try and see where it takes you. There’s absolutely nothing to lose. Keep telling yourself that you’ll try just one time, and then one more time after that, and recognize that you can stop anytime you want to. Before long, I predict you’ll be hooked! Here are some stories from other EC’ing parents about how they got involved with EC.

I originally heard about EC from a friend. During a long international flight she met a young woman who was traveling with a young toddler after visiting India for several months. My friend was fascinated because the child was not wearing a diaper and told her mother when she needed to go to the bathroom—especially impressive, since both the child and mother had a stomach bug and the child had diarrhea. I remember thinking, “That’s so crazy. You can’t do that. I know, since it’s already so hard to get my stepson to use the potty.” Fast-forward to my being pregnant with my first child and we’re *still* trying to potty train my stepson. While researching cloth diapers on the Internet, I stumbled across mention of EC and was hooked. It simply resonated with me this time. My friend still reminds me that she was the first one to tell me about this “wacky” idea!

—SAM, MOM TO WILLOW, 14 MONTHS

I heard of EC through a good friend. It seemed like an amazing idea, and at our first

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