



ELIMINATION DISORDERS

ENCOPRESIS

What it is:

Encopresis is a disorder that is typically found in young children, over the age of 4. The essential characteristic of encopresis is the repeated passage of faeces into inappropriate places, such as in clothing or on the floor. Most often this passage of faeces will be involuntary, but it can also be intentional. For a diagnosis of encopresis to be made, the event must occur at least once a month, for at least three consecutive months. The chronological and developmental age of the child must also be 4 years or older. The faecal incontinence should not be caused by a medication such as a laxative, or a physical medical condition, with the exception of constipation.

When the passage of faeces is involuntary, it is often related to constipation, impaction or retention, which can result in overflow. The constipation may be caused by psychological factors, such as general anxiety or anxiety about using public bathrooms, which leads to the child choosing to not use the bathroom when needed. Children with encopresis may feel ashamed and may try to avoid situations, such as school or social outings that could lead to embarrassment. The child's self-esteem could also be damaged by exclusion or ridicule by peers, or anger and punishment by caregivers. When the incontinence is clearly deliberate, features of conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder may be present.

Common symptoms:

1. Repeated passage of faeces into inappropriate places, such as clothing or the floor. This can be involuntary or intentional
2. At least one such event per month in a three month period
3. The child's chronological and developmental age is 4 years or older
4. The behaviour is not caused by medication such as a laxative or a medical condition such as an upset stomach

Causes:

Painful defecation may lead to constipation and a cycle of not wanting to pass faeces, which could make encopresis more likely. The use of certain medication, such as anti-convulsants and cough suppressants, may also lead to constipation which could make encopresis more likely.



**SA Federation for
Mental Health**

Remember to always consult a mental health or medical practitioner regarding any questions you may have about a mental health diagnosis and treatment options.

This factsheet is based on information obtained from the DSM-5:
American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.*