

S'MOTHERHOOD:

FLUSHED

THIS ARTICLE COMES WITH A WARNING. What I am going to share is not for the weak of mind—or stomach. In fact, I'm just going to go ahead and give this article an R-rating: for nudity and adult language. Read on, but know, you've been warned.

For the most part, I have come to learn that raising triplets is not very different from raising children in the more conventional way, of say, one or two at a time. The only difference is the obvious—there are more at once—and really, this just requires some strategizing.

Strategizing can take different forms, but in our home, it is usually done at night, with children in bed and over a bottle of wine. The recent topic up for discussion was the most advanced, most complex and most dreaded we had faced in our 2½ years of child raising: potty training.

Our incentive was to neutralize the exorbitant cost of diapers, which at its' height hit over 160 diapers a week and could have very well fed, and college-educated a small country.

After many tactical meetings, we concluded our best bet for success would be to hit potty training head on—all three at once.

Given our circumstances, our resources and our children's personalities, we decided to go with a two-fold approach: first, shock and awe. We hoped to utilize the element of surprise to its full potential and make diapers a complete thing of the past in a week. Maybe two? The second facet of our approach (that is unique to a triplet situation) is the use of peer pressure. We figured if we could just get one of them going, the others would follow suit. We thought we might even get lucky and end up with the 11-month-old potty trained as well.

We felt very confident with our plan.

So with strategy in place, I found myself that fateful first morning of Potty Training Boot Camp armed with Resolve (both the feeling and the carpet stain remover), optimism, three portable potties and five pounds of M&M's. I answered the three quizzical expressions with our new mantra "Bye! Bye! Diapers!" and proceeded to distribute brightly covered underwear and panties along with memos of our new schedule of events. I proceeded to talk with them about the "ins" and "(not) outs" of potty training with an amount of animation and excitement that would give Elmo a run for his red obnoxious money.

What I did not know the first morning of Potty Training Boot Camp, was that the words "pee-pee" and "poo-poo" would become fixtures of my vocabulary, finding themselves into most, if not all of my sentences uttered in a day.

The initial presentation of the potty was met with blank stares. And it was not until I broke out the M&M's—one M&M for pee-pee in the potty—two M&M's for poo-poo in the potty, that I saw flickers of understanding that only promises of candy can bring to a child's face.

"I think they bought it," I reported to my husband over the phone that afternoon.

By the evening of our first day of Potty Training Boot camp, I felt tiredly optimistic. I hadn't expected perfection and we were only down one bottle of carpet cleaner. I felt our two-fold strategies of shock and awe and peer pressure had been a success.

What I did not know was that my three Potty Training Trainees were coming up with some strategies of their own.

On day two of Potty Training Boot Camp, my three Trainees met my quizzical expression with chants of "Bye! Bye! Underwear!" and after that, things started to go to, well, poo-poo.

It quickly became clear the two-fold strategy was collapsing. For one, we had clearly lost the element of surprise. And secondly, peer pressure was backfiring. Sure, it did work in one sense in that if one of them used the potty and was rewarded with an M&M, then the other two would hurry to sit down on their respective potties to eke out the drops of liquid gold that would land them an M&M as well. But what we had not calculated was that peer pressure worked the other way as

well. So when one dear son began urinating on the latest issue of InStyle Magazine, the other two would run to find publications of their own to pee on.

I could not deny them their camaraderie though. They would all gather around the designated hitter going for the “two M&M” jackpot and cheer him on. Upon finishing, they would all gather around like referees to make the call “IT’S A *TWO M&M*, Mommy!” Inevitably the initial call would be questioned, “No, I think maybe it’s just a *ONE M&M*.” At this point, I would dash to make the final call before a naked wrestling match erupted and the 11-month-old climbed into the potty for her own game of patty cake. “It’s a Two M&M,” I would pronounce, at which point, applause and congratulations would break out among the trainees with hugs and slaps on the back. The big winner would then take a naked victory lap around the house while I hurriedly disposed of the evidence before the next round.

After that, the next two days of Potty Training Boot Camp are a blur. My therapist diagnosed me with PTSD (Potty Training Stress Disorder) and told me it’s not uncommon for one’s mind to erase memories and details that are too horrific to deal with. From the hazy memories I do recall, I can say that potty training in our home was a lot like a frat party, except louder—and with more naked bodies.

By the end of day three of Potty Training Boot Camp, I was exhausted and discouraged as I inventoried the pile of soiled underpants and empty bottles of carpet cleaner. Ready to wave the white flag, I consoled myself with a glass of wine and consumed the five pound bag of M&M’s.

Nevertheless, on day four of Potty Training Boot Camp, I dug my heels in, refusing to return to our diaper days. I forged on, no longer armed with strategies, but with grit (dear goodness, I hope that it was just grit!) and determination.

And on the fifth day, they broke.

Most likely they were just hung over from the shock of sugar to their little systems. It is possible they tired themselves out with all the naked running around. For whatever reason, on day five, potty training clicked.

I think we all learned a little something during Potty Training Boot Camp. My children learned how to use the toilet and I learned that sometimes, with parenting, that’s exactly where well-made plans and strategies belong too.