

## Toilet training

Toilet training is a significant step in your child's development and should be approached with patience and understanding.

This guide will help you understand how to approach this important milestone and provide practical tips.

### Recognising readiness

Children will show signs of readiness at their own pace, which can include:

- **Awareness of a wet or soiled nappy:** They might tell you when their nappy is wet or soiled, either by pointing to it, using words or simply taking it off
- **Understanding the act of urinating:** They may tell you when they are urinating or have urinated
- **Longer dry periods:** Staying dry for at least an hour
- **Behavioural cues:** Fidgeting or seeking privacy when they need to wee or poo
- **Verbal cues:** Telling you in advance when they need to wee or poo (knowing that it is about to happen is the key to successful toilet training).



### Preparing for toilet training

- During nappy changes talk about what they have done to help them understand. Use phrases like, "You've done a wee" helps children understand and gives them the words to use. Share what their poo looks like – children can develop a fear of pooing. Helping it be 'normalised' from an early stage will help them to know what to expect
- Change nappies in the bathroom to associate the space with toileting. Encourage your child to flush the toilet, such as if you have tipped the poo from a nappy into the toilet, and wash their hands
- Consider what you will use. You can choose to use a potty to start with and move onto a toilet or use the toilet from the start. It is helpful to use a toilet training seat for this, which is a smaller seat that fits to your toilet. Ideally, choose items which are appealing to your child, such as their favourite colour, so they are interested and motivated
- You can introduce a potty into children's play from an early stage, sitting dolls or teddies onto the potty while the child's nappy is being changed. Consider allowing your child to watch you or older siblings using the toilet so that they can learn from observation
- Share books about using the toilet, such as *Pirate Pete's Potty* or *Princess Polly's Potty* by Andrea Pinnington, *I Want My Potty!* by Tony Ross or *Lulu's Loo* by Camilla Reid
- Involve your child in buying knickers or underpants which appeal to their interests.

## When to start

- There is no set age for when to start toilet training. If children are showing the signs of readiness, then this is a good indicator that the process will be successful. Remember all children develop at different rates, so try not to be influenced by when an older sibling started or by other children of a similar age
- Choose a calm period, avoiding times when there are planned disruptions or changes in your routine
- Summer is a popular time as it's easier when children to wear fewer clothes, and laundry dries faster
- Focus on getting your child potty trained during the day before you start leaving their nappy off at night. Many children will not be dry at night until after they have started in primary school.

## Getting started

- If you are using a potty, keep one potty in the bathroom. If this is upstairs, you may find it useful to have another potty downstairs for easy access
- Make sitting on the potty a regular part of your child's day, for example after taking of a wet nappy, sit on the toilet and sing some songs or read a book together before putting on a clean nappy. Don't pressure the child into having to 'do' something every time they sit on the potty
- Learn your child's signals and as soon as you notice your child the needing to wee, encourage them to use the potty
- Be proactive and encourage potty time regularly throughout the day, especially after drinks and food. You are likely to know your child's routines and habits so anticipate the times they are likely to need to go
- If your child has a regular time for bowel movements, try leaving their nappy off and suggest using the potty
- Spend time practicing getting trousers and pants down and pull them back up. Use elasticated waists and avoid zips, buttons, belts, etc. to support them with being independent.

## Be prepared for wetting and soiling accidents

- Stay calm and clean up any accidents without making a fuss to avoid causing anxiety
- Have plenty of spare underwear and socks
- Have patience if accidents are frequent or your child seems upset - it's okay to take a break and try again later.

**Remember,** every child is different, and readiness can vary. Be patient and supportive throughout the process.

## Positive reinforcement

Offer praise for successes, avoid making too big a deal of accidents.

Encourage intrinsic motivation (children being happy at their own success) rather than using external rewards such as stickers or sweets. They are not using the potty to please you – they are doing it to gain independence, so any motivations should be focused on their progress towards the goal.

## Potty training pants

Disposable or washable training pants can be used as a step between nappies and regular pants. However, disposable 'pull-ups' tend to soak up the urine and the children don't get the sensation of being wet, so they fail to associate urinating with wetness; this can hinder their progress towards recognising the signs that they need to use the potty or toilet.

If you choose to use these, motivate your child to keep their training pants dry by using the potty. Make sure that they are used consistently (such as for car journeys only) so your child doesn't get confused about when they are expected to use the potty.

## Consistency

- Take the potty with you when you go out
- Ensure other caregivers follow the same potty training approach
- If your child attends nursery, talk to their key person to ensure you both use consistent approaches. This includes the language you use and how you are motivating and encouraging your child's success
- Remember to take lots of spare clothes to nursery, including shoes and socks.

If you are worried about your child, e.g. becoming constipated through not wanting to poo, delay or regression in being potty trained, etc. talk to your GP or health visitor to get advice and guidance.

## More information

How to potty train - NHS: <https://bit.ly/3YxS6B4>

Let's go potty - ERIC: <https://eric.org.uk/potty-training/>