



Toilet training

Toilet training is one of those child developmental stages that parents can find frustrating and complex. Making the transition from nappy to toilet can certainly be a challenge, particularly if you feel it is a battle - but remember this is a developmental skill, not a war!

- By choosing the right time and approaching toilet training in a calm, patient manner, you can help your child get to grips with this new skill as quickly and smoothly as possible.
- It is important to remember that every child is different so try not to compare your child to others. You may feel under pressure to 'get toilet training out of the way', perhaps because you have another baby on the way, or your child may be starting nursery soon.
- But rushing toilet training is counter-productive and it's worth bearing in mind that:
 - by the age of three, 9 out of 10 children are dry most days;
 - by the age of four, most children are reliably dry.
- So rather than rushing toilet training at the last minute, at around the age of 18 months - 2 years gradually introduce sitting on the potty or toilet as part of your child's normal day.

We've put together some tips and advice to help you overcome common toilet training troubles. They cover areas such as deciding whether your child is ready for toilet training and how to support your little one as they learn this important new skill.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 07/07/2020 and will be reviewed again in 07/2022 and when new evidence becomes available.

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- From about the age of 18 months your toddler will be aware that they have a wet or soiled nappy. They begin to recognise the sensation of passing urine and as they get a little older they may tell you that they need to do a 'wee'. Many parents start to think about toilet training their child between 18 and 24 months but remember that all children are different.
- If your child has additional needs do not think that you have to delay toilet training – in fact starting early has shown to be particularly successful. Becoming toilet trained is a developmental skill that can be taught, using the same approach as typically developing children but in a more structured way. The 'step by step' approach provides a framework to follow, integrating toilet training into the child's daily routine. An overview of the step by step approach can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2ZLCvQ7>
- Look out for signs such as fidgeting, walking in a funny fashion or going somewhere quiet or hidden – these are all indications that your child is aware that they are about to go to the toilet, and are cues that your child might be ready to start toilet training. Parents need to be proactive and encourage interest by the use of potty training books etc.
- When you are ready to start toilet training, choose a time when you can be at home and things will be calm and relaxed. If you have a busy few weeks ahead of you, or other pressures to contend with, it might be worth waiting until you can give toilet training your full attention, rather than trying to 'slot it in' to a busy schedule.
- Starting toilet training during the summer months can help to minimise stress and frustration for both you and your child. There are fewer clothes for your child to take off and it's easier to dry clothes when your child has the inevitable accidents. However, parents should not delay toilet training just because it is the 'wrong season!'
- Talking about toilet training with your little one is a good way to provide reassurance as they embark on this new way of doing things. Visit your local library or ask your health visitor to recommend a picture book about toilet training that you can share with your child.
- You might also like to swap nappies for cloth (washable) trainer pants, which can easily be pulled up and down while you're starting out on toilet training. Using 'grown up' training pants can also be a good way of building confidence in your child if they're a little reluctant to move on from the security of a nappy. Also the cloth trainer pants will enable your child to feel wet which will help them learn to recognise signals from their bladder that tell them they need to do a wee.
- Introduce your child to a potty – explain what it's for and encourage your child to play with the potty and try sitting on it so they can get used to this new object before you start training.
- When you're ready to get going, start the day off by encouraging your little one to sit on the potty before or after breakfast. You could put the potty in the bathroom and sit on the toilet yourself to show your child how it's done.
- Give your child lots of praise as you go through toilet training together. Your little one needs lots of gentle encouragement and praise, as well as regular reminders to use the potty throughout the day.
- Consistency is vital so it's a good idea to have a few quiet days at home in the early days of toilet training. If you do have to go out, take the potty with you as it's important to keep the momentum going. Your child will become confused if you put them in a nappy for convenience, sending a mixed message that it's okay to 'wee' or 'poo' in their nappy sometimes.

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- Encourage your child to sit on the potty after each meal. Even if they don't do anything, it's a good way to encourage bowel movement as digestion is followed by a natural reflex to go to the toilet. Sitting quietly on the potty, perhaps with a book to look at, is a good way to get children used to going on the potty to do a poo.
- It's important to wait until your child is dry during the day before attempting night-time toilet training. Children cannot 'learn' to be dry at night as it is a maturation process. Night time dryness usually happens within a few months of becoming dry in the day. However, it cannot be taught and should happen naturally. If your child is still not dry at night by the age of 5 years, then do seek help. Remember that night-time bladder control may take quite a bit longer to achieve, so be patient and wait until your child is truly ready for this next step (i.e. when your child is dry for several consecutive nights).
- If toilet training isn't going well, then do speak with your HV. Identifying what the particular issue is can help in working towards finding a solution e.g. refusing to sit on the potty. This may involve going back a step or introducing incentives such as a reward chart. Sometimes having a short break and then starting again can be beneficial. Your HV can help with such common problems.

Additional Reading:

You can find lots of reliable advice on overcoming common potty training problems at:

Bladder & Bowel UK: <https://bit.ly/3fZQqsh>

NHS Choices: <https://bit.ly/381DnUu>

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