

Potty Training

Potty training is an important milestone in your child's development. Some children get it within a few days but many more take several months. Learning to take control of the bowel and bladder can be a complicated process for your child and you need to be sure that they are both physically and emotionally ready to potty train. Rest assured that the age that a child is potty trained is not linked to intellect. Girls are often ready for potty training sooner than boys.

When is your child ready to potty train?

Most children begin to potty train at around age two, but some children may not be ready until they are in their fourth year. Proper toilet training is virtually impossible for children under the age of 18 months because the muscles that control the flow of urine from the bladder are not yet under their control.

Watch out for signs that they are interested and ready to potty train. The following is a checklist of signs of readiness:

- Awareness that they are doing a wee or a poo (your toddler will be starting to link cause and effect).
- Your child can manage to stay dry for at least 1½ - 2 hours between wet nappies.
- Your child shows an interest in the potty or toilet and imitates your bathroom habits (children learn so much through observing and copying).
- Your child is able to understand simple requests such as 'do you need a wee?' or 'where's your potty?'
- Your child shows a desire to please and cooperate and enjoys praise.

Preparing for potty training

If you think that your child might be ready to give potty training a go, start when they are chirpy and in good health i.e. not teething or suffering from a streaming cold.

How to get started

Be relaxed and make it fun!

Starting your toddler off on a potty is usually easier than introducing them to an adult toilet straight away. Potties are easier for your child to sit on, they are the right size for them and they can be moved around easily. Adult toilets can also seem enormous to toddlers, who often worry that they'll get flushed away.

Once your child is confident using a potty you can then begin to familiarize them with the toilet, using a step to get up and to rest their feet on and a trainer seat to help them feel secure. However, children often want you to hold them when they are on the toilet, even when they are proficient toilet users.

Introduce your toddler to the potty in a casual way, allowing role play with teddies or dolls. Often starting with the potty in the bathroom and suggesting that your toddler use it before bath time works well. If your child is not interested, back off.

Let your own circumstances dictate when you begin and avoid a time when there are too many distractions.

Explain to your child what you are doing; let them know that they are a big girl/boy now and that from now on they need to do their wees and poos in the potty/toilet, and not in their nappy.

Ditch the nappies. It is often easier to potty train in the summer when your child can run around without a nappy on but this time clearly doesn't suit everyone. However, your child does need to feel the difference and start to associate going to the toilet with the big wet puddle that they are standing in!

Expect accidents and don't get cross and frustrated with your toddler. Don't punish your child when they have an accident. Be sympathetic and ensure that you shower them with plenty of praise and encouragement.

Encourage regular visits to the potty. Invest in some fun pants that they will want to wear and consider using an incentive such as a chocolate button/a sticker for successes – they really seem to focus their minds! Reward them for letting you know when they need a wee or poo as opposed to actually being clean and dry. It will come.

Don't expect children to be able to wipe themselves – you will need to be prepared to help them with this for some time. It is important to teach girls to wipe themselves from front to back to avoid infections.

Boys usually find it easier to learn to wee sitting down on the potty before attempting to master standing up to wee. When they do start to stand they will need to encouragement to develop a good aim – putting a couple of ping pong balls in the toilet works well.

Be patient and go at your child's own pace. If your child doesn't seem to be progressing then you may choose to leave potty training for a while – your child simply may not be ready; don't worry, false starts are very common.

Potty training out and about

Toddlers can't go 'just in case' before you go out or start a long journey. Nor can they 'hang on' for long periods of time. Take several changes of clothes out with you in the early days and change their clothes promptly if they do have an accident. It's unpleasant for anyone to have to sit around in soiled clothing and it is illogical to think that this will reinforce their need to go to the toilet. It won't. Take a potty out with you in the car and consider buying a portable potty to place in a change bag if you find that your child needs to go almost immediately.

Becoming dry at night

Becoming dry at night often takes some time after mastering toilet training during the day. Most children achieve this by the age of five but not all.

If your child is reliably dry during the day then you may wish to consider removing nappies at night. A good indication of your child's readiness for this is when their nappy is becoming less saturated at night and after any day time naps.

Talk to your child about whether they feel happy to leave their nappy off at night. You can protect the bed with waterproof toweling pads or sheets.

Ensure that your child has a wee just before you tuck them up in bed and leave on a night light so they can see at night if they need to get up. If they are still using a potty you could leave it where they can get to it themselves but most children will come to find you at night if they need a wee. Praise them for this even if you feel cross at having your sleep disturbed.

Concerns

If you have concerns about how long it's taking for your child to become clean and dry (day or night), contact your Health visitor or GP for advice.