

Toilet training

When your child is showing some awareness that he is weeing or pooing in his nappy, is doing proper wees rather than continual dribbles and perhaps showing some interest in using the potty or toilet, start to think about toilet training.

Toilet training is one of the most emotive areas of child development. Do not get upset about it. There is a huge variation in the ages when children are ready for potty training. Other parents will talk about their own child's successes and you may feel pressure to start toilet training, particularly from people of the older generation who tried to potty train earlier. Ignore them and think only of your child, his needs and development stage.

As well as your child being ready you must think of your own needs:

- Think about what toilet training will mean for you. Changing nappies is one thing, but clearing up soiled pants and mopping up puddles can really get you down. You must not show any annoyance with your child and it can be quite difficult. Make sure you are in a mood to handle it.
- Try it at a settled time when there are no major emotional disruptions such as a new baby or a trip away. It will be much easier for you and your child.
- It is much easier to potty train in your own home, when you are not out and about too much and haven't got to worry about other people's homes.

Preparations and practical arrangements

Make life as easy as possible for everyone:

- There will be a lot of washing and a lot of clearing up. Summer is therefore easier because washing dries quicker, children wear less and you can do a lot of potty training outside.
- Make sure your child is wearing clothes that are easy to remove, like pull-on trousers.
- Buy lots of pairs of pants, as you will get through a lot each day to begin with.
- A period when your child is on holiday from playgroup/school is often a good time to start as you can stay at home more easily. If your child goes to a playgroup, school, or childminder, keep them informed and get them to use the same method.
- Use either a potty or "training seat"; whatever suits your child. To begin with take it everywhere with you as your child will probably not be able to give you much warning.

The theory

Once you start you should not stop but persist, however long it takes. However, if you find you have misjudged the timing and your child is clearly not ready, stop, go back to nappies and try again in three to six months' time.

You must praise successes to the skies and ignore failures

Be as relaxed as possible. It is important not to get cross or to show any kind of annoyance or frustration at having to clear up mess because it can be counter-productive, making your child upset and uncooperative.

You need a word, sign, or symbol to indicate 'toilet'. It might be the word toilet or wee, or you could use a sign. Eventually you will want it to be generally understood. If your child does not yet understand a sign or word you will need to give him one. Every time he goes on the potty or toilet make the sign or say the word and keep reinforcing it. Tell other people who care for him what his sign or word for toilet is.

Be patient

It may take days, weeks, or months. However long it takes there may be lapses for a long time afterwards. Changes of routine, too much excitement, illness, different drinks, and different environments can severely disrupt toilet training for a few hours or days.

The practice

Show your child what to do. Take him to the toilet with you and show him your wee and poo. You can use the potty yourself for a bit.

Put your child on the potty when you think you might have some success. For instance, if you know he always does a poo after lunch, take his nappy off and put him on the potty then. See what success you have.

At some point, however, you will have to stop using nappies altogether and put your child on the potty, either when you think you might have some success or very frequently (maybe every half-an-hour to begin with).

Ignore frequent accidents totally and don't get upset if he doesn't do anything on the potty. When your child does do something in the potty praise him excessively, if possible get the whole family to admire his achievements. Really overdo the praise with smiles, clapping, etc. Some children with ASD find the praise distracting and even frightening. You will need to monitor your child's reactions and gauge how much praise will reinforce the success.

As a parent you may be able to recognise that your child wants to go to the toilet by her body language, such as scratching the groin, or manic behaviour. Use those clues.

That's all there is to it. You just want to catch some poo or wee, praise him and the praise will encourage your child to repeat his achievement when he is placed on the potty.

Initially, you will control when your child goes on the potty. It is a nuisance for you to be forever remembering to put him on the potty, but it is also a nuisance for your child so he will learn to say 'no' when you suggest it and he is not interested.

Eventually, your child will be able to tell you that he wants to use the toilet but initially he will only be able to give you short notice. Even if it's too late, never mind; just praise him for telling you. Gradually he will recognise his needs more easily and

give you more notice. Carry a potty with you everywhere and don't be embarrassed about getting it out and using it in public. It is a lot easier than dealing with a child who has wet or soiled pants.

Points to remember

Sometimes it can be very difficult to get a child to sit on the potty at all. Try entertaining him with something he loves (reading books, singing games, or blowing bubbles), to get him on the potty and to keep him there for a few minutes.

When you start potty training it is tempting to put nappies back on when you go out, but ultimately you have to make the commitment to toilet training and remove them totally. It is too confusing for a child to work out that when he has nappies on he can wee in his nappy, but when he hasn't he must wee in the potty.

If your child soils his pants make sure you clean the poo into the potty to reinforce that the 'poo goes in the potty not your pants'.

Watch out that you don't make a reward out of failure. Some children love seeing all the fuss involved with clearing up the mess. If that is the case, exclude your child from the scene as quickly as you can without upsetting him and then clean up.

Some children learn to wee in the potty first, some to poo first, and some to do both simultaneously. There is no right or wrong order. There is nothing you can do but be patient.

If your child's toilet training seems to be going backwards increase the level of praise again to regain momentum. It could be that you have got out of the habit of praising success.

Dry at night

There is not much you can do to make your child dry at night except wait for him to do it by himself. If you notice his nappy is dry consistently in the mornings remove nappies at night and see what happens. Try the following ideas to establish a good routine or if things start going wrong:

- Put your child on the potty last thing at night and first thing in the morning.
- If he wets his bed at around waking-up time, set your alarm for thirty-minutes earlier than normal and get him up to wee in the potty to re-establish the routine. Once dry again gradually move the alarm setting back.
- Leave a potty in his bedroom so he can easily get up to use it.
- Use mattress liners and half-sheets to ease changing wet sheets in the middle of the night.

Further reading:

Newman, S. (1999). *Small steps forward: using games and activities to help your pre-school child with special needs*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.