



# Potty Training

**It can be messy! There will be accidents! Potty training is an important milestone for your child, but learning to gain control of the bowel and bladder can be a complicated process and your child needs to be emotionally and physically ready to potty train.**

Your child will learn to understand and know how to react and respond to the feeling that they need to empty their bladder or bowel. They will also need to understand what you want them to do and how to do it.

Some children seem to train themselves needing little input from parents, perhaps by simply taking their nappy off and refusing to wear it again. But for others, the process of learning how to use the potty doesn't run smoothly and it can sometimes feel stressful for both of you.

## **When are children ready to potty train?**

We have all heard tales of children who were clean and dry very early, but in reality most children are around two, and many are nearer three, before they start to show signs that they are ready for potty training.

Research shows that bladder capacity increases significantly between the ages of two and three, so most three year olds should be able to hold on and be dry for a reasonable period of time.

If your child seems to be a late starter, be reassured that the age a child is potty trained is not linked to intellect. Nor does it correlate with other stages of development. For example, if a child was an early talker, it doesn't necessarily mean they'll be potty trained earlier. Also bear in mind that girls are often ready for potty training sooner than boys.

Although children with physical or learning difficulties may start potty training later than others and it may take a little longer to become clean and dry, you can begin to prepare them by reading books on potty training and buying a potty together.

## **Let your child set the pace**

Potty training is a stage of development that cannot be hurried - like crawling, walking and talking; children will pass these milestones when they are ready.

If other children seem to be out of nappies but your child isn't yet, don't worry, and don't feel pressurised into starting too soon - many children are not potty trained at three and some are still not trained at the age of four.

You and your child will get there, potty training is much more likely to be successful if you let your child set the pace, and you know how to recognise the signs that your child is ready.

## **Are you ready to catch the potty train?**

Parents can feel pressured to begin potty training their toddler by nurseries, childminders, grandparents, or even by other parents.

There is always someone who proclaims the ease with which their child was clean and dry at a very young age and it all adds to that feeling that we're failing our children if we don't potty train them early.

Yet, we also know that children develop at different rates - the same is true for potty training, each child's natural 'readiness' to start potty training varies, as does the pace at which they gain bowel and bladder control.

It is important not to start potty training before you and your child are ready. There is no 'right' age to potty train but each child will have their own 'right' time; most children show signs of readiness to potty train between 18 months and three years.

If your child is not ready to be potty trained the process will take longer and the likelihood of accidents will be greater.

## **Signs of readiness for potty training:**

- Your child can manage to stay dry for at least 1½ - 2 hours between wet nappies.
- Regular or predictable bowel movements.
- Indicating awareness that a bowel or bladder movement is occurring - perhaps by interrupting what they are doing and concentrating, or

going off somewhere quiet for a poo, or telling you that they have had a wee or poo, or showing signs of discomfort when the nappy is soiled.

Disposable nappies are very absorbent and it's possible your child may never have felt the sensation of being wet. Putting a non-absorbent liner inside the nappy, or wearing a pair of pants underneath the nappy or changing to cloth nappies could provide this sensation. See if your child feels uncomfortable or asks for a nappy change.

- Your child is able to understand simple requests such as 'where's your potty?' or 'do you need a wee?'
- Your child has the coordination and ability to sit on and get up from the potty and can manage to pull pants up or down with only a little help.
- Your child shows a desire to please and cooperate.
- Your child enjoys praise.
- Your child shows an interest in others using the toilet and imitates. Children learn so much through observing and copying and potty training is no different.

## **How to begin potty training**

There are no hard and fast rules on how to potty train. Some parents take it slowly; others prefer to train more intensively. The important thing is to be relaxed and to make it fun for both of you.

For most children it is easier to begin by using a potty rather than a toilet as it's easier to sit on, it's the right size for toddlers, it can be moved around easily and a child is able to try to use it independently fairly quickly.

When your child is confident on the potty you can encourage them to start to use the toilet; when that time comes they will need a step to help them climb up and rest their feet on and a child's toilet seat to help them feel secure.

If your child is showing signs of readiness and you know you will have the time and patience to commit a few days to start potty training, then you are ready to begin.

Let your own circumstances dictate when you start and try to plan ahead to avoid a time when there are too many distracting events so you are well

prepared and able to commit time. Have confidence in your own ability to judge the right time for your child.

Use your common sense; if your child is going through a resisting 'no', 'can't' or 'won't' stage, then it's worthwhile postponing potty training until the phase is over.

If your child has other regular carers it will be helpful if you let them know that you are starting potty training and try to encourage consistency in your approaches.

## **First steps**

The first step in preparing for potty training is deciding what you are going to call things – many people call it wee and poo, others call it pee and number twos. Use words that you are comfortable with as you will use them a lot over the next few weeks and months.

## **Talk about wee and poo**

And then at every opportunity talk to your child about weeing and pooing! Let your child see you on the toilet and show them what you've done.

Start encouraging your child to let you know when they are weeing or pooing and give lots of praise when they tell you what's happening.

Awareness that a wee or poo has happened is important, and comes before awareness of the need to go.

Read stories about potty training and take your child shopping to help choose a potty and pants.

Decide where the potty will be kept; the bathroom or somewhere easily accessible is best. Don't forget to tell your child what it is for and suggest they try it out, and give praise if they do - and be prepared to demonstrate this yourself!

Happily talking about sitting on the potty and being happy to practice sitting on it is a really good start! If you let your child run around without a nappy or pants on, you may even find they have a wee or poo on it!

## **Put the potty where it's easy to get to**

Put the potty in an accessible place and tell your child where it is. Ideally your child will be able to get to it and use it without asking, but this will probably happen later rather than sooner.

You may notice that your child has a pattern to their weeing and pooing, if so you can encourage them to use the potty around the times when they would normally go. If not, encourage your child to sit on the potty every couple of hours; not too often or for more than a few minutes each time or they may get bored.

If your child asks for the potty in between, then all the better. Perhaps you could use potty time to sing rhymes or look at books together.

If your child has a regular time for opening their bowels; perhaps after breakfast, try to 'catch it' by sitting your child on the potty at that time. If and when you do 'catch' something show your pleasure and approval.

## **Accidents will happen**

Show pleasure and give praise every time your child sits happily or wees or poos in the potty.

If your child gets up and runs away from the potty, stay calm, encourage them onto the potty again later. It is inevitable that accidents will happen and remember they are part of the learning process; be patient and go at your child's pace – it takes time to potty train and children have a lot to learn during the process.

Encourage your child to be involved and pull the flush when you empty the potty down the toilet – and don't forget to both wash your hands.

## **Showing signs of needing to wee**

Children are often busy and interested in playing and don't always notice that they need to have a wee or a poo.

You'll often see signs such as wriggling; learn to recognise the signals your child gives when they need a wee or poo and guide them to the potty straight away as they often can't hold on for very long.

Resist the temptation to ask your child every half hour if they need to use the potty as this could become irritating for both of you.

Your child might need reminding at times though, for instance half an hour after having a drink if they haven't yet asked for the potty.

## **Abandoning nappies**

Some parents prefer to potty train in the summer when their child can run around without nappies, for others that isn't possible. However, nappies will need to be abandoned in the daytime at some time during potty training to avoid giving confusing messages.

Some parents choose to change from nappies to absorbent training pants or pull-ups as they can be pulled up and down, others make the change straight to pants.

It is very likely there will be a risk of soiled pants and puddles but if everything goes well these may be fewer than you think.

Tell your child in advance that you feel sure he or she will be able to wear pants instead of nappies and you could take a shopping trip together to choose which pants to buy.

Dressing your child in clothes that are easy to pull up and down will help their ability to use the potty independently and will also help you on those occasions when you both need to make a quick dash to the potty!

And don't forget to use shoes that can be washed easily, when the inevitable accidents occur your child won't think or have time to move their feet out of the way.

Give your child plenty of praise and encouragement. And, if you feel your child is almost there but is still having accidents, an incentive may just do the trick.

## **Progressing**

A reward system, such as a star chart, might work well but it's important to offer rewards for using the potty and for letting you know when they need to wee or poo rather than for being clean and dry.

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.

Be patient, go at your child's own pace; it takes time to potty train and there will be frustrations, for some it can be quick but for others it may feel like a long haul.

Let your child know what you want but above all be consistent, be positive, provide lots of praise and make your child feel clever and special.

## **Boys - standing at the toilet**

To begin with it's usually easier if boys learn to wee sitting on the potty before mastering standing up and weeing in the toilet. When they start to stand, they will need a step and you may find it useful to put ping pong balls in the toilet to develop a good aim. Boys should be encouraged to gently shake the penis when they finish weeing to get rid of the last few drops.

## **Becoming independent**

A child can be considered potty trained when they are able to use the potty fairly independently. This means they know when they want to go and are able to react by using the potty.

Wiping can take a while to master and is quite difficult for most young children, you will need to do this yourself initially – but you can introduce the idea and begin to practice when you feel your child is ready. Girls need to learn to wipe from front to back to avoid infections. Wet wipes can be useful at this stage. Always wash hands when you finish.

The ability to gain bowel and bladder control follows a pattern for many children - bowel control occurs first and this can be identified by more predictable and regular bowel movements, then daytime bladder control is achieved before night-time bladder control.

## **Night time dryness**

If your child is reliably dry during the day, you may start thinking about removing nappies at night.

Indications that your child may be ready to become dry at night are a dry or less saturated nappy in the morning or after a daytime nap.

Talk to your child to find out if they would like to leave off their night-time nappy. You can protect the bed using waterproof products such as those in the wide range available from ERIC ([www.ericshop.org.uk](http://www.ericshop.org.uk)).

Make sure your child has a last wee before you tuck them up in bed. They may wake and need a wee so leave a soft light on and make sure the potty or toilet is within easy reach.

It is not unusual for a child under five to still be wet at night, if your child doesn't seem to be ready, you may consider trying again in a few weeks.

## **It doesn't end there...**

For many parents the pace of life is so busy that once a child has been potty trained it is easy to neglect the need to ensure there is time in the day for children to have a relaxed sit on the toilet for a poo.

Putting a daily toilet routine in place will ensure that going for a poo is a routine part of your child's day and encourages the complete emptying of the bowel on a regular basis, helping to lessen pooing accidents and avoid constipation.

A daily toilet routine is especially important for boys who, once they begin to stand up to wee, have to make a special effort to sit on the toilet and pooing can become rushed or simply forgotten, leading to constipation.

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

**Call the ERIC Helpline for support and information on potty training, childhood bedwetting, daytime wetting and soiling and constipation. The ERIC Helpline is available each weekday between 10am and 4pm, on 0845 370 8008.**

**Visit the ERIC webshop for potty training resources [www.ericshop.org.uk](http://www.ericshop.org.uk) or call 0117 301 2101 for a free catalogue.**



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