

Toilet training

Helping your child start to use the potty (or toilet) is a big and very exciting step for you both. If you remain positive and calm, your child will be more likely to settle into things. The secret is to wait for signs that your child is ready.

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When to start?

Children learn to tell when they need to do a poo or wee at different ages. Generally, signs that your child is ready for toilet training appear from about two years on, although some children show signs of being ready at 18 months. Night-time training can be as late as eight years, although most children stop wetting at night by the time they're five.

Before introducing the toilet or potty, it helps a lot if you have an established daily [routine](#) with your child. This way, the new activity of using the toilet or potty can be slotted into your normal routine.

Your child is showing some signs of being ready if he:

- is walking and can sit for short periods of time
- is becoming generally more independent when it comes to completing tasks
- is becoming interested in watching others go to the toilet (this can be awkward or make you uncomfortable at first, but is a good way to introduce things)
- has dry nappies for up to two hours – this shows he's able to store wee in his bladder (which automatically empties in younger babies or newborns)
- tells you (or shows obvious signs) when he does a poo or wee in his nappy – if he can tell you before it happens, he's ready for toilet training
- begins to dislike wearing a nappy, perhaps trying to pull it off when it's wet or soiled

did you know ?

- Once toilet training starts, it can take 3-4 weeks for most children to achieve dryness. For some children, this process can take several months.
- It's common for children to have accidental soiling even a year or two after toilet training.

- has regular, soft, formed bowel movements
- can pull his pants up and down
- can follow simple instructions, such as 'Give the ball to daddy'
- shows understanding about things having their place around the home.

Not all these signs need to be present when your child is ready. A general trend will let you know it's time to start.

Getting ready

First, decide whether you want to train using a potty or the toilet. There are some advantages to using a potty – it's mobile and it's familiar, and some children find it less daunting than a toilet. Try to find out your child's preference and go with that. Some parents encourage their child to use both the toilet and potty.

Second, make sure you have all the right equipment. If your child is using the toilet you'll need a step for your child to stand on. You'll also need a smaller seat that fits securely inside the existing toilet seat, because some children get uneasy about falling in.

In the beginning, you might like to read a book or watch a video or DVD about toilet training with your child. There are some fun children's books your child might like to read in the early stages of toilet training.

Some tips for getting started:

- Look for signs that your child is ready to start toilet training (see above).
- Introduce and explain the potty, allowing your child to try it out for size and get familiar with it.
- Allow your child to watch others who are using the toilet, and talk about what they're doing.
- Begin to use trainer pants on your child – this helps her understand the feeling of wetness.
- You might notice that your child uses her bowels at a certain time of the day, so try putting her on the potty at this time. This doesn't work for all children – true toilet training begins when the child is aware of the sensation of doing a wee or poo and is interested in learning the process.
- Teach your child some words associated with going to the toilet – for example, you might want to teach her words like 'wee', 'poo' and 'I need to go'.



Our [toilet training guide in pictures](#) can help you get started. You could even print it out and stick it up somewhere handy.

Basic steps for toilet training

- Choose a start day, perhaps when you have no plans to leave the house.
- Stop using nappies (except at night and during daytime sleeps). Begin using underpants or training pants. You can even let your child choose some underpants, which can be an exciting step for him.

- Dress your child in clothes that are easy to take off – for example, trousers with elastic waistbands, rather than full body suits. In warmer weather, you might like to leave her in underpants when at home.
- Sit your child on the potty each day at times when he's likely to have a bowel movement, like 30 minutes after eating or after having a bath.
- Give your child lots of [fibre](#) to eat and water to drink so she doesn't become [constipated](#), which can make toilet training difficult. Your child's diet is the best way to handle this, rather than buying fibre supplements.
- If your child doesn't cooperate or seem interested, just wait until he's willing to try again.
- Give your child positive [praise](#) for her efforts (even if progress is slow), and lots of praise when she's successful. You could say 'Well done Janey for sitting on the potty'. As she achieves each stage, reduce the amount of praise.
- Look out for signs that your child needs to go to the toilet – some cues include changes in posture, passing wind and going quiet.
- At different stages throughout the day (but not too often), you might ask your child if he needs to go to the toilet. Gentle reminders are enough – it's best if your child doesn't feel pressured.
- Five minutes is long enough to sit a child on the potty or toilet. It's best not to make your child sit on the toilet for long periods of time, because this will feel like punishment.
- You'll need to wipe your child's bottom at first, until she learns how. Remember to wipe from the front to the back, particularly with little girls.
- Teach your boy to shake his penis after a wee to get rid of any drops. Sometimes, in the early stages of toilet training, it's helpful to float a ping pong ball in the toilet for him to aim at. Or he might prefer to sit and do a wee, which can be less messy in the early stages.
- Teach your child how to wash her hands after using the toilet. This can be a fun activity that your child enjoys as part of the routine.
- If he misses the toilet, don't comment. Just clean it up without any fuss.

Toilet training might take days or months. It's not a race (no matter what other parents tell you about their own 'wonderful' children!).



The key is to not push your child. Relax and let him learn at his own pace – he'll get the hang of it when he's ready. Encourage him with gentle reminders and stories. What your child wants most is to please you, and praising him will tell him what a good job he's doing.

Wet nights

Even if your child uses the toilet or potty during the day, it's not time to throw away the nappies just yet – often, children are between three and four years of age before they're dry at night. Some children still wet the bed at six or seven, or even older.

Make it clear to your child that you'll help her in the middle of the night if she wakes up needing to

use the potty. Assure her that there's nothing wrong if she has an accident at night.

Using training pants

Children are more likely to understand toilet use if they're no longer wearing a nappy – after all, the nappy is a portable toilet. So after your child has had a few weeks getting used to the potty, it's a good time to start with training pants. These are absorbent underwear worn during toilet training. Once your child is wearing training pants, dress him in clothes that are easy to take off quickly.

Wearing training pants is a big move for your child. If you celebrate it, the transition will be easier. Talk about how grown-up she is and how proud of her you are.

'Pull up' training pants are very popular, and are marketed as an aid to toilet training. Research isn't conclusive about how beneficial they are for toilet training, but they might help with the transition to underwear.

Training pants are less absorbent than a nappy. They're useful for holding in bigger messes (such as an accidental poo).

Generally, cloth training pants are less absorbent than disposable training pants (or 'pull-ups'), and can feel a little less like a nappy. Disposables might be handier when going on outings.

Setbacks and accidents

Your child has only just developed the amazing physical ability to manage this body process. As a grown-up, you might not remember, but this takes a while to get right. You can expect accidents and setbacks – these are all just part of the process.

If your child gets upset because of an accident, reassure him that it doesn't really matter and there's no need to worry.

To help avoid accidents:

- Pay attention to your child if she says she needs the toilet immediately. She might be right!
- If you're sure your child hasn't done a poo or wee in a while, remind him that he might need to go – he might get so caught up in what he's doing that he doesn't realise he needs to go until it's too late.
- Check if your child wants to go to the toilet during a long playtime or before an outing. If she doesn't want to go, that's fine.
- Try to make sure the potty or toilet is always easy to access and use.
- Ask your child to wee just before going to bed, and try to avoid big drinks at bedtime.



Try to stay calm if toilet training seems to take longer than you expect. Stay positive about your child's achievements, because he'll get there eventually. Too much tension or stress can lead to negative feelings and might result in your child avoiding going to the toilet.

Health problems

You're probably well tuned in to how your child's feeling and how regular she is. But it's still worth keeping an eye out for possible problems connected with toilet training. Signs to look for include:

- a big increase or decrease in the number of poos or wees
- poos that are very hard to pass
- unformed or very runny poos
- blood in the poo or wee (sometimes appears as cloudy wee)
- pain when your child goes to the toilet.

If you feel there might be a problem or you're worried about how your child is adapting to toilet training, check with your doctor or child health nurse. You can get free advice from a continence nurse by contacting the National Continence Helpline on 1800 330 066.



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- ▶ Wikipedia - Bristol stool chart

GLOSSARY

fibres

The parts of vegetables, fruit and cereal that can't be digested. Fibre plays an essential role in keeping our digestive systems healthy. It also helps to lower glucose and cholesterol levels. Adequate fibre intake can help to prevent bowel cancer, diabetes, heart disease and constipation.

constipation

A condition characterised by hard and large poo, and pain or problems when doing a poo. Constipation can also cause stomach pain. Constipation is often caused by a lack of fibre or by dehydration. You can help your child avoid constipation by ensuring your child eats a healthy diet with lots of fruit and vegetables. Your child should also drink lots of water, exercise regularly, and maintain regular toilet habits.

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Parenting and Family Support Centre, Triple P. (2000). *Positive parenting of toddlers toilet training* [Tip sheet]. Brisbane: University of Queensland.