
Toilet training

Summary

- Your child needs to be between the ages of 18 months and three years before they are mature enough to recognise the urge to go to the toilet.
 - Toilet training is a new skill for your child to learn.
 - Praise every little success and remain calm about accidents.
 - Your child might take years to reliably master night-time dryness. This is normal.
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Learning to use the toilet is an important step in your toddler's life. Some toddlers get the knack quickly, while others need parental patience and support.

Don't start toilet training too early. Children usually reach two years of age before they can recognise and respond to toileting signals such as a full bladder. Premature toilet training will only frustrate you and upset your child, because they can't do what you ask of them.

A child usually masters daytime toileting well before they can keep their bed dry at night. There are many practical suggestions you can try to manage bedwetting. Remember that if your child is scared of the dark, going to the toilet at night is an enormous challenge.

Avoiding stress over toilet training

Toilet training takes time. Try to keep a relaxed attitude. Toileting is not a reflection on your parenting. If you treat toileting as a matter of discipline and punish your child for accidents, you are starting a fight you can't win. You will delay toilet training by making your child unhappy and anxious about going to the toilet.

When a child is ready for toilet training

Keep using nappies until your child show signs that they are ready to start toilet training, including:

- age – your child needs to be between 18 months and three years before they are mature enough to recognise the urge to use the toilet
- interest – your child expresses curiosity in watching others go to the toilet. Although this might seem embarrassing at first, it's actually helpful to the child if they can see parents or older siblings using the toilet
- dryness – their nappy stays dry for up to two hours, showing they are able to store urine in the bladder. For example, their nappy may be dry when they wake up from their afternoon nap
- disliking nappies – they may tell you they hate wearing nappies, or else try to take them off themselves, particularly after soiling them
- awareness – your child can tell you they're pooing or weeing while they're doing it, or can tell you straight after. If they can tell you before it happens, they are definitely ready for toilet training
- attention – they have the ability to sit in one position for two to five minutes.

Potty versus toilet during toilet training

You have to decide whether you want your child to use the toilet or a potty. Issues to consider include:

- Some children are scared of falling into the toilet, so a potty might be best.
 - A potty can be used in any room in the house and can be taken on car trips.
 - A child who exclusively uses a potty may be too afraid to use any toilet, which can make outings difficult, unless you take the potty with you.
 - If your child is using the toilet, you'll need to buy a step and a smaller seat that fits securely inside the existing
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toilet seat.

- Some parents encourage their child to use both the toilet and potty.

Preparation for toilet training

Suggestions for preparing for toilet training include:

- Choose the toileting words you're going to use – for example poo, wee or pee.
- Start talking to your child about going to the toilet. It may help to talk about what you're doing on the toilet while your curious toddler watches.
- Tell them they won't have to wear nappies any more if they go to the toilet. For some toddlers who are sick of wearing nappies, this may be all the motivation they need.
- If your child will be using a potty, encourage them to sit on it whenever you're sitting on the toilet.
- Work out the procedure together and make sure your child understands. For example, you might say: 'When you need to go to the toilet, come and tell me and I'll help you'.

Starting toilet training

Suggestions for starting toilet training include:

- Stop using nappies during the daytime and put your child in underpants. Continue to use a nappy for daytime sleeps.
- Dress your child in clothes they can easily manage – for example, trousers with elastic waistbands instead of buttons and zips. In warmer weather, consider leaving them bare-bottomed at home.
- Give a gentle reminder at regular intervals throughout the day to see if they need to go to the toilet. However, don't nag.
- Don't make them sit on the toilet or potty for long periods of time, because this will feel like punishment.
- You will need to wipe their bottom for them at first.
- Teach them to wash their hands every time they go to the toilet. Use a special soap just for these occasions.
- If your child is showing the ready signs, they will learn quickly. However, they may continue to have accidents at various times. Don't lose patience or heart.
- If they refuse to use the toilet or potty, don't force them. Leave it until they are willing to try again.
- If one week goes by without any success, postpone all attempts and try again a few weeks later. Remember it is not a race or a test.
- Praise success. You could try rewards like an animal stamp on their hand. Reduce the praise as the skills are mastered.
- Be casual about accidents – take an 'oh well, it doesn't matter' attitude.
- Don't try at stressful times, such as when you have a new baby.

Accidents during toilet training

Suggestions for dealing with toileting accidents include:

- Expect accidents. Your child has been wearing nappies their whole life, so remembering to use the toilet will take practice.
- Toddlers can't hold on for long. At first, they may only have enough time to tell you they need to go to the toilet before they wet their pants.
- Give your child credit for trying, even when they don't make it to the toilet in time. Praise them for telling you they needed to go or for pulling their pants down.
- Your child may become upset or discouraged by accidents. Reassure them that accidents don't matter, and that it takes time and practice to master toileting.

Coping with setbacks in toilet training

Sometimes, toilet training is two steps forward and one step back. Your child may seem to have mastered toileting, only to regress (go backwards). Life events or changes in routine, such as a new baby brother or sister, or an illness, are common triggers.

Suggestions include:

- Don't get angry. Your child isn't deliberately trying to annoy you. Avoid any sort of punishment, such as making them clean up their own mess. Stay calm and positive.
- Your child may be feeling too pressured to succeed. Forget about toilet training for a week or two, and give them time to relax.
- Make sure your child feels supported in their efforts to master toileting.
- It may help to try and make toileting 'fun' for a while. For example, you might sing songs together or read a book to them while they're sitting on the toilet, but don't overdo it.

Night-time toilet training

Don't assume that your child can keep their bed dry just because they can manage their toileting when they are awake. A child usually masters daytime toileting before they can keep their bed dry at night. Most children under the age of five years still urinate in their sleep, and one in 10 younger primary school children do too. It can help to think of staying dry at night as completely separate from daytime toilet use.

To decide whether your child is ready to go without nappies at night, consider signs such as:

- If your child wakes up every morning with a wet nappy, they're not ready to stop wearing nappies at night. If you stop using night-time nappies at this stage, your child will wet the bed.
- If their nappy is usually dry in the morning, or it becomes wet only just before your child wakes (the nappy will be soaked and the urine warm), they may be ready.
- If your child tries to go to the toilet during the night or calls out for your help, you could try night-time toilet training.

Preparations for night-time toilet training

Suggestions include:

- Make sure your child can manage to get out of bed and can easily remove their pyjamas. Encourage your child to practise pulling their pyjama pants up and down.
- Talk to your child about going to the toilet at night-time. Work out your procedure together. Will they go to the toilet themselves, use a potty in their bedroom or wake you up for help?
- You may need to talk about your chosen night-time toileting procedure a few times. For example, you might say: 'Come into my bedroom and wake me up when you need to go to the toilet, and I'll help you'.
- Put a waterproof mattress protector on their mattress.
- Make sure your child has easy access and vision to find the toilet at night.

Tips for night-time toilet training

Suggestions for helping your child stay dry at night include:

- Make a trip to the toilet a part of your child's bedtime routine.
- Casually remind your child to get up in the night if they need to go to the toilet.
- If your child wakes up for any reason during the night, ask them if they want to go to the toilet before being tucked back into bed.
- Avoid pressuring your child. They're keen to master toileting and anxious about disappointing you.
- If your child is dry in the morning, give gentle praise, but don't be concerned if they're wet.
- Don't get angry or frustrated at your child for wetting the bed. If the extra washing bothers you, buy pull-ups.
- Don't punish your child for wetting the bed. They're not doing it deliberately to annoy you. Be calmly reassuring – your child needs your guidance.

Things to avoid in night-time toilet training

Some approaches will only delay your attempts to help your child stay dry at night. Approaches to avoid include:

- Don't criticise, humiliate or belittle your child for being a 'baby'. Night-time bladder control is a process of maturation. You should praise all efforts, no matter how small.
- Don't punish your child by making them stay in their wet sheets or getting them to wash the soiled bed linen, for example. If your child is anxious, they are less likely to stay dry at night.
- Don't deprive your child of fluids in the evening. Make sure they drink plenty during the day so that they are not very thirsty in the evening.
- Don't talk about your child's 'problem' to other people when the child is present, as this can make them feel ashamed and embarrassed.

Problems staying dry at night

If your child is finding it difficult to stay dry at night, helpful suggestions include:

- Remember that it might take years for your child to reliably master night-time dryness. Don't stress about it or compare your child's efforts with other children who seem to be dry at night.
- If your child is scared of the dark, going to the toilet at night is an enormous challenge. Perhaps you could put nightlights in the hallway. It may help to leave the child's bedroom door open for easy access.
- If your child feels that trekking all the way to the toilet is still too daunting, you could put a potty in their bedroom.
- Make sure your child feels that it's okay to wake you up in the night when they need to go to the toilet.
- If your child is becoming anxious or frustrated, take the pressure off. Forget about night-time toilet training for a while.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Maternal and child health nurse**
- **Parentline** Tel. **13 22 89**
- **Tweddle Child and Family Health Service** Tel. **(03) 9689 1577**
- **Maternal and Child Health Line** (24 hours) Tel. **13 22 29**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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