

Topic Summary

Teaching your child to use the toilet can be stressful for any parent and there is no right way to do it. However, there are some strategies that you can follow which might make things a little easier. For some children with disabilities, toilet training may require a little more time while other children may never achieve complete independence, although having a toileting programme will help ensure a child is treated with dignity and respect.

This factsheet will talk you through the various stages of toilet training and give some hints and tips that other parents have found helpful.

When to start?

There is no right time to start toilet training with your child, it is very much down to the individual as to when they might be ready but if your child is doing any of the following it may be an indications that you can get started:

- Shows awareness of bowel or bladder movement
- Your child can have a dry nappy for over one and half hours
- Your child shows an interest in the toilet, for example, how it flushes
- Being uncomfortable in a dirty nappy

When you are ready to make a start it is helpful to choose a time when you are both relaxed and don't have too many other things going on in your life; the long Summer holiday can be the ideal opportunity.

Getting going

1. Many children, especially those with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, find it helpful if you establish a **routine** around using the toilet, for example, always going to the toilet after a drink/meal/sleep. Follow the same sequence every time you use the toilet, e.g. trousers down, pants down, sit on potty/toilet, wee/poo, wipe, pants up, trousers up, flush, wash and dry hands. Other children will not follow a pattern, in which case, sit them on the pot every few hours.
2. If using a pot, always keep it in the same place-sometime having one for downstairs and one for upstairs can be helpful
3. Be comfortable talking about wee and poo-some children are fascinated by the whole process, while others might find it rather scary.
4. If your child responds to praise, **praise** them when they wee or poo in the pot. Some children respond well to 'musical' pots while others like to be read/sung to while on the pot/toilet or keep a special toy next to it. Likewise, when your child has an accident, do not tell them off, but be patient and reward them with praise when they get it right. Organisations like ERIC (see useful contacts box below) provide downloadable reward charts.
5. For children who find change difficult, it may be an idea not to use a pot at all, and to start using the toilet from the beginning, using a trainer seat and step
6. Many children find the use of photos, pictures or signs (for example, Makaton, PECS) useful in helping them to understand what is expected of them. Pictures must be clear and easily visible.
7. Running the tap can help a child to have a wee

Bowel movements

1. It can often be easy to tell when your child needs a poo and its possible to get them to the pot/toilet in time.
2. Some children find having a poo quite scary and it helps if they understand what is happening
3. Laughing, blowing up a balloon or blowing bubbles can help aid bowel movements.
4. Occasionally, children enjoy having bowel movements and will poo in inappropriate places. This is known as encopresis and can be due to psychological or physical factors.
5. Some children find the sensation of having a full nappy comforting and feel vulnerable when it is taken off. The National Autistic Society suggest wrapping your child up in a tight blanket to help them feel secure. Alternatively, you could try cutting a hole in the child's nappy and encourage them to have a bowel movement through that, gradually making the hole bigger.
6. Occasionally children with additional needs will enjoy handling or smearing their poo. A way round this can be to give your child gloopy materials to play with.
7. Always ignore unwanted behaviour and encourage good behaviour.

Night times

Once you feel that your child is getting the hang of using the pot/toilet then you will want to encourage him/her to be dry at night. For some children, pull-ups work well, keeping the pot nearby and putting them on the pot last thing at night. For other children, once they are out of the habit of wearing a nappy during the day, it can be confusing to then put one on at night. In these cases, bed-mats can be useful—these can be bought from any large supermarket. Limit the amount of drinks your child has an hour before bedtime.

Boys—Standing or sitting

Once your son has the co-ordination, you might want to teach your son to stand to wee. This can be done by example, or by floating something in the toilet to aim at, for example, a ping-pong ball or cereal that floats.

Children with more complex needs

For some children, it is not possible to stay dry due to the nature of their disability. It is, however, still important to follow the same routine so that they keep their dignity and know what to expect when they are being changed. However, when you are out and about it can be almost impossible to find an appropriate place to change your child. To this end, the organisation Changing Places was set up to campaign for more toilets which are publicly accessible and include enough space and the right equipment, including a height adjustable changing bench and a hoist. There are now 600 fully accessible toilets in the UK and a full list can be found on the Changing Places website :

http://www.changing-places.org/find_a_toilet.aspx

Changing Places toilets can be found in Southsea (Southsea Library and Customer Service Centre), Marwell, Southampton (including West Quays), and Staunton Country Park.

Useful tips

- ⇒ Using wipes, rather than toilet paper, can be better for children sensitive to texture
- ⇒ Treat your child to some pants with their favourite character on them
- ⇒ If required, use a visual (social) story to help your child understand what you expect of them. Photos can work well here
- ⇒ Make the bathroom a relaxing and comfortable place to be e.g. not too cold, avoid too many distractions, etc
- ⇒ For children sensitive to noise you may have to turn off the fan when they are in the room, or not flush until they have left the room
- ⇒ For children with physical disabilities, the input from an occupational therapist may be useful to help ensure your child is comfortable while using the pot or toilet
- ⇒ Place a bed mat on the car seat when on longer journeys

[Where to find out more](#)

ERIC: National charity that supports children with continence problems and campaigns for better continence care. ERIC has a range of downloadable leaflets and reward charts that can be printed off. They also have a helpline providing support on continence issues.

Telephone 0808 1699 949 (Monday to Thursday 10am-2pm)

Website <https://www.eric.org.uk/>

Email [Web Enquiry Form](#)

The **National Autistic Society** has a section on toilet training for children with autistic spectrum conditions.

Telephone (Helpline) 0808 800 4104 (Monday-Friday 10am-4pm)

Website <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/toilet-training.aspx>

Cerebra have produced a lovely guide which sums everything up on one sheet and can be downloaded as a pdf at : <https://cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/guides-for-parents/toilet-training/>

Solent NHS Trust have a telephone advice line for parents and professionals who would like advice directly from a therapist and live in Hampshire, Southampton or Portsmouth. The number is : 0300 300 2019

Berkshire Healthcare have produced a range of useful information about toilet training. <https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/support-and-advice/personal-and-social-skills/toilet-training/>

Makaton— a language programme using signs and symbols to help people communicate

Visual story— Visual stories are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

PECS— stands for Picture Exchange Communication System and is an alternative communication system using pictures and symbols

Reinforcing positive behaviour — praising good behaviour

Encopresis— medical term for children who soil their clothes after they've been toilet trained or smear faeces

Bed mat— a disposable absorbent sheet that protects the bed

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