

Toilet training

Helping your child learn to use the potty or toilet is a big and very exciting step for you both. If you stay 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 for toilet training.

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Toilet training: signs that your child is ready

You might see signs that your child is ready for toilet training from about **two years on**. Some children show signs of being ready as early as 18 months, and some might be older than two years.

Your child is showing **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, including saying 'no' more often
- is becoming interested in watching others go to the toilet – this can make you uncomfortable, but it's a good way to introduce things
- has dry nappies for up to two hours – this shows he can store wee in his bladder (which automatically empties in younger babies or newborns)
- tells you with words or gestures 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
- has regular, soft, formed bowel movements
- can pull his pants up and down
- can follow simple instructions like '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.



did you know ?

First-born children often take longer to toilet train than their younger siblings. Girls are often quicker than boys.

Once toilet training starts, it can take weeks to months for most children to achieve dryness.

It's common for children to have accidental soiling even a year or two after toilet training.



If you're thinking about toilet training, you might like to check out our [toilet training guide in pictures](#). You could even print it out and stick it up somewhere handy.

Getting ready for toilet training

If you think your child is showing signs of being ready for toilet training, the first step is to 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 scary 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**. For example, 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.

Third, it's best to **plan toilet training for a time when you don't have any big changes** coming up in your family life. Changes might include going on holiday, starting day care, having a new baby or moving house. It can be a good idea to plan toilet training for well before or after these changes.

Also, toilet training might go better if you and your child have a regular daily **routine**. This way, the new activity of using the toilet or potty can be slotted into your normal routine.

Here are some **tips for getting ready**:

- Teach your child some words for going to the toilet – for example, 'wee', 'poo' and 'I need to go'.
- When you change your child's nappy, put wet and dirty nappies in the potty – this can help your child understand what the potty is for.
- Let your child try sitting on the potty or the small toilet seat to help her get familiar with the new equipment.
- Let your child watch you or other trusted family members using the toilet, and talk about what you're doing.
- Once or twice a day you might want to start putting trainer pants on your child – this helps him understand the feeling of wetness.
- Make sure your child is eating plenty of **fibre** and drinking lots of water so she doesn't get constipated. **Constipation** can make toilet training harder.



Once you start, toilet training might take days, weeks or months. The key is to not push your child, and let him learn at his own pace – he'll get the hang of it when he's ready. And if your child doesn't cooperate or seem interested in toilet training right now, just wait until he wants to try again.

Starting toilet training

It's a good idea to **start toilet training on a day when you have no plans to leave the house**. The tips below can help with toilet training once the big day arrives.

Timing

- Sit your child on the potty at times when you've noticed she often does a poo, like 30 minutes after eating or after having a bath. This doesn't work for all children – true toilet training begins when your child is aware that she's doing a wee or poo and is interested in learning the process.
- Look out for signs that your child needs to go to the toilet – some cues include changes in posture, passing wind, going quiet or moving to a different room by himself.
- If your child doesn't do a wee or poo after 3-5 minutes of sitting on the potty or toilet, take her off. It's best not to make your child sit on the toilet for long periods of time, because this will feel like punishment.

Encouraging and reminding your child

- **Praise** your child for trying (even if progress is slow), especially when he's successful. You could say, 'Well done for sitting on the potty'. This lets your child know he's doing a good job. Gradually reduce the amount of praise as your child masters each part of the process.
- At different stages throughout the day (but not too often), ask your child if she needs to go to the toilet. Gentle reminders are enough – it's best if your child doesn't feel pressured.
- If your child misses the toilet, try not to get frustrated. Children don't usually have accidents on purpose, so just clean up without any comments or fuss.

Pants and clothing

- Stop using nappies (except at night and during daytime sleeps). Start using underpants or training pants all the time. 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 you're at home.

Hygiene

- Wipe your child's bottom until your child learns how. Remember to wipe from the front to the back, particularly with girls.
- Teach your son to shake his penis after a wee to get rid of any drops. Early in toilet training it sometimes helps to float a ping pong ball in the toilet for him to aim at. Or he might prefer to sit to do a wee, which can be less messy.
- 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.



Often, children are 3-4 years old before they're dry at night. One in 5 five-year-olds and one in 10 six-year-olds still uses nappies overnight. And [bedwetting](#) is very common in school-age children. If your child wets the bed, there are things you can do about it when you and your child are ready.

Training pants and pull-ups

Your child is more likely to understand toilet use if he's no longer wearing a nappy.

Training pants are absorbent underwear worn during toilet training. They're less absorbent than nappies but are useful for holding in bigger messes like accidental poos. Once your child is wearing training pants, dress her in clothes that are easy to take off quickly.

Pull-ups are very popular and are marketed as helpful for toilet training. It isn't clear that they actually help. But you can try them to help your child get used to wearing underwear.

Generally, cloth training pants are less absorbent than pull-ups and can feel a little less like a nappy. Pull-ups might be handier when you're going out.

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

Out and about while toilet training

It's easier to stay home for a few days when you start toilet training, but you'll probably have to go out at some stage.

Wherever you're going, it's a good idea to check where the nearest toilet is. If you're going to a local shopping centre, ask your child if she needs to go when you get there. This can help get her familiar with the new area.

It's best to take a spare change of underpants and clothes for your child when you're out, until he's very confident about using the toilet. It's also a good idea to carry plastic bags for wet or soiled clothes.

If your child goes to a child care service or to friends' or relatives' houses without you, let people know that she's toilet training. This way they can help her use the toilet or potty in the way that you do at home.

Setbacks and accidents while toilet training

Learning to do wees and poos in the toilet takes time. 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 matter and there's no need to worry.

Here are **ideas to help avoid accidents**:

- Pay attention to your child if she says she needs the toilet straight away. 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 be 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 get to and use.
- Ask your child to wee just before going to bed.



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

It's 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 watery 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 GP or child and family health nurse.



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