

Children, Young People and Families Occupational  
Therapy Team

## TOILETING ADVICE

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## Getting Started

When your child is ready physically and emotionally, toilet training will happen. The right time to start will vary with each child. Physical voluntary control over the muscles, which open and close the bladder and bowel usually begins at around 2 years of age.

Many children find it difficult to achieve independence in toileting. Difficulties with postural motor control, balance, body and touch awareness all impact on developing the skills required to manage going to the toilet independently. The following information outlines strategies and adapted strategies to help with this.



If you attempt toilet training before he/she is ready then you may end up with a battle of wills, a waste of time and frustration for you both.

Before you start toilet training you will need to discuss your ideas and opinions with the other adults involved and come up with a compromise about methods and language so that everyone uses a consistent approach.

Whatever method is used it should be agreed that punishment will not be used at any time during the toilet training programme, however frustrated you become!

All children need some help and guidance for toilet training, even if some learn more quickly than others.

- Start to fill in a potty training chart. Check nappy at half-hour intervals. If nappy is dry leave the square blank. If nappy is wet colour in the square.
  - Fill in the chart methodically and don't give up! Does any pattern emerge in the first week? It may be necessary to do this for a second week.
  - It is not abnormal to find that no pattern emerges. If this is the case decide to "try for a wee in the potty" before lunchtime.
  - This is suggested because the traditional routine in nursery and in school is for children to be asked to go to the toilet and wash their hands before morning break time, lunch time and before the end of the day. This is a good routine to aim for.
- Take your child to the toilet with you so he / she sees what happens and sees you act as a role model.
- Choose the place for the potty. The toilet, bathroom, kitchen - near a washbasin or sink.

- Help the child to recognise particular terminology such as, being wet, wetting now, about to be wet and encourage them to use the words appropriately.
- Watch your child for signs such as, pause in play, faces, crutch clutching, awkward walk and ask the child if he needs to go to the toilet.
- Teach concepts of “before” and “after”, “wet” and “dry”.
- Let the child sit on potty nude from waist down to see what he/she is doing.
- Use specific terms, for example, wee and poo and avoid terms which are too technical, for example, urinating or faeces or those which associate bodily functions as dirty or disgusting.
- Talk about advantages of being dry and clean, e.g. no nappies, no sore bottoms, grown up.
- Practice pulling pants with loose elastic up and down.
- Let your child sit on potty to get familiar with it, flush toilet, wash hands afterwards, put potty away / get it out and pull off toilet paper, etc.



## When on the Potty

- Give enough time to try but not too long to get bored (about 10 minutes at the most).
- Talk about what you are doing e.g. "waiting for the wee wee" (a running tap may help).
- Make sure YOU have time - do not hurry.
- If you are successful, use your chosen activity as a reward - a new book to read on the potty - or new pictures to pin up.
- Gradually increase the number of times you have potty time - it is a good routine to try two hours before and two hours after a successful time.
- When on the potty, blowing games and activities will naturally encourage the stomach pushes needed to pass urine or motions. Try bubble blowing, blowing party whistles, blowing bubbles with a straw into a cup.
- Encourage resting hands on the lower tummy to encourage awareness of stomach movements and to be aware of the bladder.



### **When to use Training Pants/Pull Ups**

- Start using trainer pants at any stage in the programme. As a guide, when you have one successful wee in the potty per day is a good time to start.
- Trainer pants have the advantage of being less tight fitting than a nappy and are easier to pull down and up both for you and your child.
- Children may become more aware if wet / soiled in loose fitting clothes.
- Remember all children are different. Some need to use the potty more frequently than every 2 hours, for example every 1 and a half hours. Alternatively your child may need to wait for up to 3 hours but then need to go urgently. It is impossible for an outsider to plan your programme; often it will rely on your instinct and your knowledge of your individual child's behaviour.

## **Bowel Control**

Once the child stops having night-time bowel movements and a regular daytime patterns begins to appear, try the following steps.

- Sit the child on the potty or toilet at usual bowel opening time.
- If there is no regular time then try 30 minutes after a meal.
- Only sit the child for a few minutes and stay with them.
- Praise for staying on the potty or toilet and trying to do a poo on it.
- Try not to refer to poo as dirty when flushing away.
- Allow your child to tip out the potty and empty away the poo and wave goodbye to it.

## **Night-time Control**

This often occurs much later than daytime control by months or sometimes years. Continue using nappies at night even if wearing training pants in daytime.



## Optimising Success

Summer time is easier for potty training as the child wears less clothing and can wear no pants if necessary.

- Wear loose elasticated clothes that are easy to pull down / up without fastenings.
- Allow 3 - 7 days at home initially when you “drop everything” when the child has to “go” to the toilet.
- Tell the child he must tell you when he wants to go or indicate somehow.
- Sit the child on the potty on waking up in the morning, before and after naps, after meals, after being dry for 2 hours and before bedtime.
- Keep the child company and read to him/ her or sing songs whilst on the potty.
- Praise all progress profusely and reward immediately.
- Run tap for inspiration or sprinkle water on genitals.
- Ask occasionally if the child needs to do a wee or a poo.
- Set a timer to remind the child to sit on the potty by themselves.
- Say, “after you use the potty we will .....”
- Try Pull Ups instead of nappies.
- Keep the potty training routine structured for several weeks.
- If no success wait a few weeks or months and try again.
- Give extra fluids during the daytime so the child needs to urinate more often and therefore gets more practice.
- Only let the child sit for 10 minutes at most on the potty / toilet or until urine / faeces produced.
- If the child has an accident, do not use any physical punishment or get angry. Try to stay calm and change him without fuss, comment or disapproval and tell him that next time wee or poo should go in the potty / toilet instead.





### **Practical help for dry beds**

- Restrict fluid intake before bedtime, give it earlier in the evening, but do not deny access to water if child is thirsty.
- Put your child on the potty before getting him into bed. To ensure a completely empty bladder, encourage him to sit on the potty before getting undressed, washed and teeth cleaned and then again afterwards just before getting into bed.
- Keep a potty beside the bed for easy access during the night.
- Keep the room warm so he will not avoid getting up because it is too cold.
- If your child is easy to wake and does not get angry at being woken, lift them and put them on the potty before you go to bed yourself.
- Talk positively about how nice it will feel to wake up dry in the morning and how grown up it is to be like adults, older siblings or friends, etc, to set up the expectation of eventually being dry all night.
- After a week of dry nights put him in training pants night and day.
- Keep a waterproof sheet between the mattress and sheet during toilet training and for some months after regular dry nights are achieved.
- Keep a sleeping bag handy if you do not want to change wet sheets in the middle of the night.



## Reward Systems

A child cannot be toilet trained until he / she is ready both physically and emotionally, irrespective of their age.

The process can be speeded up by the use of an effective award system, which is used immediately after every success on the potty.

Rewards can be chosen that will motivate your child and also to comply with your own feelings on the matter.

**Always give verbal praise as well as any other reward.**

### Examples

- Hugs, cuddles and kisses for every success.
- Sweets, biscuits, fruit or other favourite food treats.
- A penny for the box for every successful urination and perhaps two for a bowel movement, to save up for a treat or toy.
- Wearing grown-up style pants and going to the shop to choose and buy them.
- Small wrapped presents to choose from, kept in a container near the potty / toilet, for every success.
- A chart on the wall to stick coloured stars or stickers onto (one colour for urination and another for a bowel movement) and perhaps a reward for a specific number of stars on the chart if your child can count.
- A reward or treat at the end of a dry, clean day.
- A special reward for a week or two of clean, dry days, for example, a toy, a visit to the zoo or park, a book, etc.
- Phoning Grandma or Grandpa to report success every day.
- The promise of wearing favourite clothes all day long if there are no accidents.
- Being pushed on the swing a set number of times for each success or playing a favourite game, singing a song, reading a story, etc.



Imagination is needed to find a suitable reward for your child and if success is not apparent, try changing the reward to one that might be more motivating to them or wait a few more weeks and then try again.

If a reward system is used then begin to fade it out after a few weeks and “forget” to give it to him or “run out” of it occasionally and only give it if he asks for it, until it can be accepted that verbal praise is sufficient reward in itself.

Encourage friends, family and neighbours to be involved and to remark to the child how pleased they are at his success on the potty. Ask them to enquire of him how his potty training is going each time they visit.

When you praise him for his efforts refer to people who he is fond of, for example, “Nanny will be pleased when you tell her how clever you are on the potty”, “your friend Lucy goes in the potty too”, “We’ll be able to tell Daddy when he comes home from work that you have kept your pants dry all day”.

**My Potty Chart** NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Use Stickers or Markers

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\*Free Potty Reward charts available from [www.pottytrainingconcepts.com](http://www.pottytrainingconcepts.com)\*

## **Understanding**

Toilet training is a complex process to learn and if your child does not fully understand what it is you want and expect them to do they are likely to fail.

- Use the simplest words that are familiar to the child and try to use them in other situations where his meaning for the words can be checked out.
- Make sure you have his attention when giving directions, call his name and encourage him to look at you and try to be at eye level.
- Stress the words you have been using for your directions and encourage him to say the appropriate words as he carries out the actions.

## **If your Child is at Nursery or School**

Try to keep the approach used at home and at the Day Care environment the same, to avoid confusion to the child.

- Communicate with the Day Care staff to ensure the language and routine is the same at home and to decide when to begin toilet training in both places.
- Check on the type of potty, potty chair or toilet seat used at the nursery and try to have similar equipment at home.
- Consider starting the toilet training at home over a long weekend or holiday period before the nursery begins their training programme.

## Wiping

- Stand to wipe.
- Place a small stool on the floor and place one leg on the stool to help give easier access for wiping. You can also place one hand against the wall to help balance.
- Try holding onto something (e.g. sink) to help balance while wiping.
- Guide your child's hand to wipe, so they get a "feel" for the correct movements.
- Use wet wipes rather than toilet paper to increase sensory (touch) awareness of where your child has touched.
- Prompt with verbal instructions to complete the activity independently.
- To increase ability to move the hand behind the body in a controlled manner, play games passing beanbags in between the legs.
- Encourage checking the tissue before dropping it into the bowl to establish if your child is clean or not.



## Useful Websites



[www.eric.org.uk/](http://www.eric.org.uk/)

'ERIC' is the UK's leading childhood continence charity working to improve the quality of life of children, young people and families in the UK who suffer from the consequences of childhood continence problems.