



# Toilet Training

## When will my child be ready?

Helping your child learn to use the potty or toilet is a big step for you both.

Most children are not ready to control their poo and wee (bowels and bladder) until they are at least 2 years old. Some aren't ready until they are 3.

Your child is ready to use the toilet or potty when they:

- are interested when you (or others) use the toilet
- know they have to do a wee or poo before doing it
- can hold on long enough to get to the potty or the toilet
- say they don't want nappies anymore, or pull at their wet or dirty nappies
- understand they're meant to use the toilet or potty.

Often, the first sign is when they tell you while they're doing a wee or poo, or have just done it. Praise your child for telling you so they learn to tell you before they do it.

## Getting ready

Teach your child the words they need – wet, dry, wee, poo, 'it's coming'. Use words that you're comfortable with.



## Potty or toilet?

Choose either a potty or the toilet – or both. Find out what your child prefers.

- A potty is mobile and less scary than the toilet for some children. Remember to take it with you if your child doesn't like using toilets.
- If you're using the toilet, you need a special toilet seat and a footstool or step (such as a couple of bricks) so your child can get up to the toilet on their own, and feel safe and relaxed.
  - Children need to be relaxed to let the wee or poo out.
  - It's easier for children to poo if their feet are on a flat surface when sitting on the toilet.
  - Make sure your child can get to the toilet (or potty) by themselves and that it's always ready for them – door open, light on at night.
  - Remind the rest of the family that there's no time to set it up when your child really has to go 'NOW'!
- If you feel OK, let your child come into the toilet with you, and talk about what you are doing.
- Learn your child's signals so you're ready to take them to the potty or toilet in time.
- Some children are afraid of being flushed down the toilet. You can use a potty, let them flush the toilet with you, or flush after they've left the bathroom.
- Make sure your toilet area is safe. Keep household cleaners, deodorants and toiletries out of reach.

## Clothing

- Start by using underpants or training pants during the day (except during daytime sleeps). Let your child choose their underpants to make it more fun.
- Make sure your child's clothes are easy to get on and off, and to wash.
- Toilet training is often easier in warm weather because there's less clothing to remove. Try letting your child run around in their underpants at home.

## Starting toilet training

If you think your child is ready, choose a time when you can stay at home, and will have lots of time and patience to give them your full attention.

Delay toilet training if there are other changes going on, such as a new baby, a sick family member, or starting childcare.

- Leave the potty where your child can see and touch it – try sitting teddy on the potty ‘to do a wee’.
- Watch for signs that they’re about to do a wee or poo (such as being very still) and guide them to the potty or toilet – ‘Let’s see if there’s a wee coming’. Eventually they’ll know and get there themselves.
- If your child hasn’t done a poo or wee for some time, ask them if they need to go – they might be too busy to remember to go to the toilet.

### Lots of praise

If your child tells you before doing a wee or poo, thank them and take them to the toilet or potty straight away. They can’t ‘hold on’ for more than a few seconds.

Even if they don’t get there in time, cuddle and praise them for trying to get to the toilet, pulling down their pants, or sitting on the toilet.

- Don’t make your child sit on a potty or toilet for long periods of time.  
Your child will think they are being punished and it does not help toilet training.
- If you want to use a reward, try stickers or stamps rather than food rewards.

It is common for children to relax and ‘let go’ as soon as they stand to walk away from the potty. They may not be quite ready for toilet training if this is happening a lot.



### Outside the house

- It’s easier to stay home for the first few days when you start toilet training.
- When you have to go out, learn where the nearest toilets are at the shops or the park. When you get there, ask your child if they need to go.
- If you’re visiting, take the potty or toilet seat with you.
- It’s OK to use a nappy for long trips or long periods away from home.
- When you’re out, have a change of underpants and clothes until you’re very confident your child can use the toilet.

### Hygiene

- Wipe your child’s bottom until they learn to do it themselves. Teach children, especially girls, to wipe from front to back.
- Teach boys to shake their penis after a wee to get rid of any drops. Try floating a ping pong ball in the toilet to aim at while they’re still learning.
- Teach your child to always wash their hands after using the toilet or potty. Make it a fun activity.

## 'Accidents' and other toilet training troubles

Learning to control poos and wees is a big change. There will be 'accidents' while your child is still learning.

- Remember that your child can't 'hold on' to a wee or poo that is ready to come out.
- If they're busy playing, you'll probably need to remind them to go to the toilet. They won't always notice that the wee or poo is coming until it starts to come out, or it's too late to get to the toilet.

### Starting too soon

Starting too soon can cause problems. You might want your child to be ready by a certain time, such as when they turn 2 or before you go on holiday. But you really have to wait until they are ready, even if it doesn't suit your plans.

### Relax

Toilet training works best when there is no pressure for you or your child.

- If you start getting stressed, stop and wait a few weeks until things are less tense.
- Don't pressure your child. You can't 'make' your child wee or poo, and learning to use the toilet is even more difficult if they're upset and tense.
- Punishment does not help with toilet training.

### Hiding when doing poo

Many children who are being toilet trained may start hiding in strange places to do a poo.

- Your child may poo behind the sofa or in a cupboard, in the garden or anywhere they feel safe. We're not sure why children do this, but they usually stop doing it by themselves.
- Don't get angry with your child for doing a poo in the wrong place, even though it's not nice to deal with. It won't help and can make things worse.
- Check that your child always has easy access to their potty or the toilet – try putting the potty in a more private place.

## Spreading poo around

Doing a poo feels good, and parents show a lot of interest in poo during toilet training, so it's normal for children to be interested in their own poo.

- Some children get some poo on their hands and spread it around.  
This isn't nice to deal with, but your child is not trying to upset you.  
Calmly tell them that we don't play with poo. Don't be angry, and clean them without any fuss – but don't reward the behaviour with a fun bath full of bubbles and toys.
- There are germs (viruses and bacteria) in poo, but hot water and normal household cleaners are usually enough to clean walls, cots and other furniture.

## Constipation

Make sure your child has a healthy diet with lots of water and vegetables so they don't become constipated (hard poo).

Encourage your child to use the toilet regularly – such as 30 minutes after each meal.

Constipation can make it hurt when a child does a poo. They may try to hold on and not be able to push it out, or become very upset.

★ **See your doctor if the problem doesn't go away.**

## ALERT

### See your doctor if:

- you're worried
- a child who has been dry during the day starts to wet their pants again
- there are any signs of a urinary tract infection, including:
  - doing wee very often
  - pain when doing wee
  - blood in the wee
- your child sometimes has wet pants during the day by 3½ years or older.

## Remember

- Toilet training is a big step and a new skill to learn.
- Start toilet training when your child shows they're ready.
- Don't set a date by which you want your child trained – it puts pressure on both of you.
- Children learn new tasks in small steps – praise each step – don't wait until they do everything properly before praising them.
- Go at your child's pace, and don't expect too much. Accidents will happen even when children are trained, especially if they're stressed or upset.
- If there are any setbacks, stop for a few weeks and then start again.
- Don't get angry, and don't make your child clean up any mess.

## Bedwetting

Many children still wet the bed long after they are dry during the day. Most children are dry during the day at around 3 years old and are dry at night by 5.

It's not uncommon for young children to wet the bed from time to time.

- Don't worry about bedwetting if your child is under 5.
- Don't make your child wash their own pants or sheets after an 'accident'. This will make them feel bad and can make the problem worse.
- Check with your doctor to make sure there is no medical problem if:
  - bedwetting continues after your child is around 5
  - your child has been dry and starts wetting again
  - one child is bedwetting at a later age than others in the family.

Check out Bedwetting at [cahs.health.wa.gov.au](https://cahs.health.wa.gov.au) or the [Raising Children Network](https://raisingchildren.net.au)



### Need more information or help?

- Child health nurse
- Your doctor
- [National Continence Helpline 1800 330 066](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/1800330066)
- [Ngala Parenting Helpline 9368 9368](https://ngala.org.au/93689368)
- [Raising Children Network](https://raisingchildren.net.au)

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

Toilet Training - extract from [Your Child 2–4 years](https://www.raisingchildren.net.au/your-child-2-4-years) magazine.

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