

# Starting a toilet training programme



Toilet training can be very stressful and there can often be a lot of pressure from other people to start toilet-training children too quickly. Children learn skills at different rates. Starting potty training early will not help your child develop any quicker. In fact, your child may learn to see the potty as something to be hated.

Children with additional needs frequently have difficulties in learning to use the toilet for a number of reasons.

- There may be physical reasons that mean your child has a lack of sensation when urinating or having a bowel movement.



- There may be difficulties in children connecting the sensations of urinating or having a bowel movement with the act of sitting on the potty or toilet.
- Some children may have difficulty in understanding what they have to do when sitting on the potty or toilet.



- Some children may experience difficulties in learning how to copy their peers in following a toilet-training programme.
- Some children may not respond to praise and so may not be motivated to continue using the potty or toilet.



- Some children may not want to sit still for even a few minutes so you may need to work on encouraging your child to sit still in one place or find an activity that will encourage them to do so.
- Finally, nappies nowadays are very comfortable and children are not motivated to stop using them.



- Some children with additional needs often have difficulty with bowel movements as they often get constipation or have loose bowel movements.

# Before you start a toilet-training programme there are some things to consider.

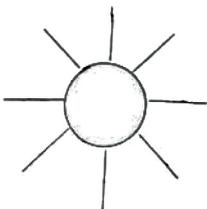
- Tell everyone what you are doing so everyone can do the same thing.
- Set a regular timetable of when you will take your child to the toilet.
- Decide whether to use a potty or go straight to the toilet.

## Am I ready?

- Start a programme when it is easy to keep to a regular routine and you don't have other things to worry about.



- Start a programme in the summer when your child does not need to wear so many clothes.
- Make sure your child is wearing clothes that are easy to take off quickly.



- Get advice from a physiotherapist or occupational therapist if your child has physical difficulties.
- Decide what reward system you will use.
- Use praise for success but deal with any accidents calmly and do not blame the child in any way.



# Is my child ready?

- Does your child have any pattern in urinating or having a bowel movement (for example, after a meal)?
- Do they show any awareness of being about to go (for example, hiding before having a bowel movement)?
- Does your child have the bladder control to stay dry for over an hour?
- Can they sit still for a few minutes?



## Things to think about

- Should I use pants or pull-ups?

There is really very little difference between nappies and pullups and so no increase in the sensation of being wet or dirty. Pants will be a signal to the child that something has changed. You can always try putting pants under a nappy. As a result, your child will get all the discomfort of being wet or soiled without you having lots of extra washing!



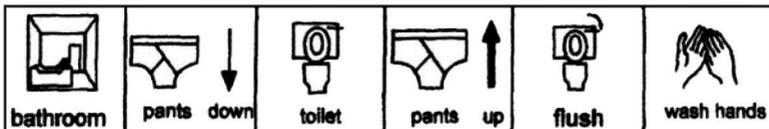
- How can I help my child 'ask' for the toilet?

From the start encourage your child to associate all the things that go with the toilet (for example, wipes or toilet paper) or use a symbol, sign or picture. This will mean the child can learn to use an object, a sign or a picture to ask for the toilet when they are ready, even if they are not yet talking.

- **How can I set a routine?**

Decide on a schedule and follow it by putting your child on the potty or toilet at regular times (for example, about every half hour).

You can use a picture or symbol schedule to reinforce the child's understanding of the process (for example, go to the bathroom, pull down pants, sit on toilet, pull up pants, flush toilet, wash hands). (See fig 1)



An example of a picture/symbol schedule

- How should I praise my child?

You will need to show your child you are proud of them. A kiss, a cuddle and a, 'Good boy (girl), you've done a wee or poo' is fine. You need to tell them why you are pleased with them.

- When should I stop?

Don't **make** your child sit on the potty. If you insist, they may refuse to sit on it or use it and this leads to more stress for everyone! If you find it is becoming a battle, put the potty away and try again a few weeks later.



- What about flushing the toilet?

Some children can find the flushing sound very frightening. If your child finds this disturbing, always give a warning (for example, 'Ready, steady, go'). Always show the reason why you are flushing, point and use words like 'All gone'. Try letting your child stand near the door to start with and slowly encourage them to come closer.

However some children are quite keen to flush the toilet any time they get a chance! If this is the case, you can try giving them something else to hold or covering up the toilet handle until you need it. Again, you could use a visual timetable to show them the right time to flush.



# Reinforcing the programme

There are lots of books about using the potty or toilet that you can read to your child to build up their understanding. Social play using dolls and teddies and a potty can also help. A visual clue (for example, a red circle) can help them work out where to stand. A target (for example, a ping pong ball) can give a clue of where to aim. You can use a particular song to encourage them to sit on the potty or toilet. Also seeing adults and other children of the same sex using the toilet can also reinforce the child's understanding of what you expect.



## Building up confidence

Some children can be frightened of the toilet and some children find it very uncomfortable sitting on the toilet or potty. It is very important to make sure your child is comfortable, so spend some time deciding what kind of potty or toilet will best suit their needs. Make sure that any steps up to the toilet are firm and steady and give good support, when seated. This is particularly important for children with physical difficulties. To start with you can let your child sit on the potty or toilet with their clothes on or put a board or towel under the seat to encourage them to start sitting on the toilet.

Always discuss any problems or concerns with your health visitor, Portage home visitor or doctor.

This booklet has been developed by Barking and Dagenham Portage in consultation with Barking and Dagenham Educational Psychology Service.

Illustrations by S L Halliwell

Portage and Early Support  
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham  
50 Markyate Road  
Dagenham  
RM8 2LD

**Phone:** 020 8724 8550

**Fax:** 020 8517 4785

MC4909

