The Potty Training Guide

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Introduction

Potty training is an important milestone in your child's development. We understand that all children develop at their own pace, but research shows it's best for your child's bowel and bladder health to stop using nappies, including reusable nappies, pull-ups and training pants, between 18 and 30 months.

It's really important that children are out of all nappies well in advance of starting Reception year in school. The only exception should be children with a diagnosed medical need, such as a bladder or bowel condition.

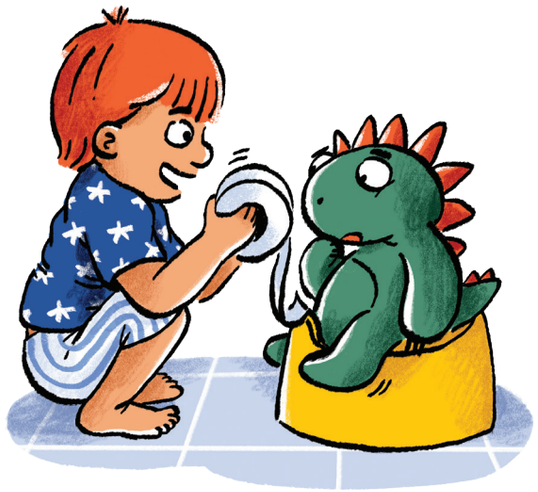
Being out of nappies not only helps children to feel confident, healthy and part of the group, it also means teachers can spend more time teaching and supporting children's development in other ways.

Did you know?

Today,

1 in 4

children aren't toilet trained when they start Reception.



How do I know when to start?

Almost all children can learn to be clean and dry with the right support, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Children with sensory needs may require additional time and support.

Potty training should be seen as a process and not a single event. It happens over time and children can practise sitting on a potty or toilet from when they can sit up independently.

Research shows it's best for your child's bowel and bladder health to stop using nappies between 18 and 30 months. Even if your baby or child has SEND, you don't need to wait to start toilet training.

Toilet training is about learning skills, and these can be taught with extra help and/or a clear routine. The longer you wait, the harder it can be for your child to learn the new routine and feel confident without nappies.

Some children will show signs that it is the right time to stop using nappies. For example, they may know and tell you when they are weeing and the gap between wees will be at least an hour. But many children will not show clear signs and most will never ask to stop wearing nappies, especially if they wear disposable nappies or pull-ups that are designed to keep them feeling dry.

Did you know?

£400

per year

is spent by British families on nappies and wipes alone - potty training earlier would save you all of that.

Around

3 billion

disposable nappies end up in UK landfill sites each year – each one can take up to 500 years to decompose!

More than

£60m

is spent per year by UK local authorities on the disposal of nappies. Potty training helps reduce environmental impact.

Make sure your child is not constipated – they should be doing a soft poo regularly (at least every other day). If you think your child might be constipated, it is important to get help with this before stopping nappies.

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Getting ready

For many children, it's helpful to bypass the potty altogether and focus on using the toilet (with an appropriate seat, step and rails) instead. Not only does this get the child used to the environment of the bathroom for toileting, but it also helps to remove an additional transitional step by removing the need to then go from potty to toilet.

But whether choosing to start with a potty or go straight to the loo, there are lots of things you can do to help your child get ready to stop wearing nappies. You can start getting ready as soon as your child can sit up unaided.

1. **Change nappies as soon as they are wet or soiled**
   This teaches your baby that it is healthy to be clean and dry. If you can, change their nappy in the bathroom to help them link it with wees and poos.

2. **Introduce your child to a potty or toilet**
   by reading some of the great potty books available with your child, helping their favourite doll or toy have a 'turn' on it and then encouraging them to sit on it themselves.

3. **Regular potty or toilet sitting practice**
   can begin once they have been introduced to the potty or toilet, building up to several times a day.

4. **Encourage a healthy diet and fluid intake**
   Give your child a diet which includes fibre (e.g. fruit, vegetables and brown bread) to help to avoid constipation, which can make potty training harder.

5. **Drink plenty of water**
   divided between 6-8 drinks spread evenly through the day. When introducing solids, offer water in a cup.

It's a team effort

If your child is already at nursery, pre-school, with a childminder or regularly looked after by grandparents, friends or other family, talk to them and discuss how you will work together to support your child's potty training journey.

Agree on the steps you will all take and ask them to support you and your child. Provide plenty of spare clothes and update them on any signs you've noticed that suggest your child might need to use the potty or toilet. This consistency will help your child learn faster.

Top tips

- **Change nappies standing up on the floor** (once your child can stand independently) in a bathroom and involve them in the process (e.g. flushing poo, washing hands, pushing trousers and pull-ups down and pulling back up).
- **Give regular nappy-free time**. Try this after they have done a wee and poo so they can experience the feeling of being nappy free, without having an accident. Help them to put the nappy back on after half an hour to keep them clean and dry.
- **Talk about wee and poo** in a matter-of-fact way.

Where can I find more resources?
These can be accessed online at
https://pottytrainingguide.co.uk

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Top tips

- **Make the bathroom feel comfortable for your child**, especially if your child has sensory processing difficulties. For example, if your child finds the noise of the toilet flush overwhelming, try using ear defenders in the bathroom.
- Some children may be sensitive to bathroom scents. Try using **peppermint, lavender or lemons in the bathroom**.
- **Wear clothes that are easier to pull down**, (e.g. joggers or leggings) rather than trousers with buttons (e.g. jeans), or skirts with tights, which are trickier to undo when it's time to go to the bathroom, are a great idea! Some children prefer to go without clothes from the waist down in the first few days after they stop using nappies.

What will I need?

- ✓ A potty (or more than one) and/or a toilet training seat plus a step to support their feet. The step should be high enough that when seated on the toilet, the child's knees are higher than their hips.
- ✓ Pants or reusable cloth training pants.

Stopping nappies

Once you've prepared and practised, it's time to stop using nappies during the day. Choose a time that works for your family, when life is relatively calm, without major changes or disruptions.

If your child has health issues affecting their bowel and/or bladder such as constipation or a bladder infection, resolve those issues before you get rid of nappies.

1 Tell your child what's happening

Let them know they're saying goodbye to nappies and explain what using the potty or toilet means.

Top tip

- The change from nappies to pants may feel strange. Have options of different shapes, colours, fabric and fit if you feel your child may find this change challenging.

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2 Now they are out of nappies, watch for signs they need to go and then guide them to the potty:

- They tell you they're weeing or that they need to do a wee.
- They know and tell you when they are wet or dirty.
- Fidgeting, going quiet, or straining (which could look like pulling faces).

When you see a sign, guide them to the potty or toilet and encourage them to try. Try to avoid prompting or asking your child if they need to use the potty too often. Encourage boys to sit down to wee especially while they are potty training. It helps them feel more relaxed and if they also need a poo, it will encourage them to go.

If your child needs help with communicating, you can use Makaton signs, pictures or photographs of the toilet etc. Choose one which will help your child recognise that it is time to use the potty or toilet.

Top tip

If your child struggles to sit on the potty for long enough, **try singing a song or reading a short book together**. Encourage them to stay on the potty or toilet until the song or book is finished.

3 Give lots of praise and encouragement!

Celebrate every attempt and success, no matter how small. Praise your child for sitting on the potty or toilet – any wee or poo is a bonus!

4 Help your child learn new skills

Teach your child to wipe their bottom, flush the toilet, wash their hands, and choose their own pants. This helps build confidence and a sense of control. Children should be able to wipe themselves by the time they start Reception.

5 Be consistent

Once your child starts using pants during the day, being consistent will help your child learn faster. It can be confusing for a child if, for example, they revert to using nappies when they go out.

Top tips

Stay calm with accidents: Clean up together, gently remind them about the potty or toilet, and move on. If you do not make a fuss when they have an accident, they will not feel anxious and worried, and are more likely to be successful the next time.

Be prepared when you venture out: If you can stay home for the first couple of days you might find it easier, but when you do go out and about, take plenty of changes of clothes. You might find a travel potty and a washable, absorbent car seat liner helpful.

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Going nappy free at nap time and night time

Once your child has stopped using nappies in the daytime, it's time to think about nap times. Being nappy free at nap times will help prepare your child to be dry at night.

Start by encouraging them to use the toilet or potty just before nap time and again when they wake up. When you notice the nappy is staying dry at least some of the time, stop using one altogether at nap time.

Being dry at night usually happens after children are potty trained during the day. Most children are dry at night by the age of 5, but for some it can take longer. It is not your child's fault if they wee during sleep.

Help your child become dry at night by:

1. Ensuring they use the toilet or potty at bedtime, even if they are going to be wearing a nappy to sleep.
2. Stop having drinks an hour before bedtime.
3. Have a consistent bedtime routine.
4. Avoid waking your child and taking them to the toilet as this encourages them to wee during sleep.

If your child isn't dry at night by age 5, speak to your health visitor, school nurse or health care professional.

Where do I go for help?

You can get help from your childminder, nursery, pre-school team, health visitor and children's centre or family hub.

You can ask about potty training during any conversations you have with your health visiting team. You can expect your health visitor to talk about potty training at your child's 9-12 month health review.

There's plenty of expert advice available, including for families of children with SEND. Visit the Potty Training Guide website for useful links, resources, and tips from the clinicians at ERIC, The Children's Bowel and Bladder Charity.

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Learners from birth

This definition was created collaboratively by:

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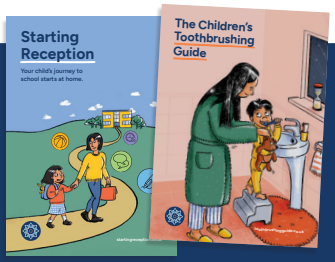
More resources

For more advice and guidance, see our guides on starting Reception and toothbrushing:

www.startingreception.co.uk
www.toothbrushingguide.co.uk



"This new guidance from early years experts will be a brilliant help in getting their children potty trained and ready for school."

– Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson

"This guidance is vital to achieving our mission of giving every child the best start in life, providing parents with expert-backed advice to support their child's health and development."

– Health and Social Care Secretary, Wes Streeting

Available online in different languages, including the following:

Arabic · Bengali (India) · Panjabi (India) · Persian (Farsi) · Romanian · Ukrainian · Welsh
Bengali (Bangladesh) · Gujarati · Panjabi (Pakistan) · Polish · Tigrinya · Urdu