

Toilet training: a practical guide

Key points

- **Children might be ready for toilet training if they have dry nappies for up to two hours, know about poos and wees, and can pull pants up and down.**
- **Toilet training equipment includes a potty or small toilet seat and training pants or undies.**
- **Try to start toilet training when there are no big changes coming up for your family.**
- **Make going to the toilet part of your child's routine. Remind your child to go, and give lots of praise for trying.**
- **Toilet training can take days, months or weeks. Be patient and keep encouraging your child.**

Toilet training: signs that children are ready

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

It might be time for toilet training if your child:

- is walking and can sit for short periods of time
- is becoming generally more independent, including saying 'no' more often
- is becoming interested in watching others go to the toilet
- has dry nappies for up to two hours
- tells you with words or gestures when they do a poo or wee in their nappy
- 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 their pants up and down
- can follow simple instructions like 'Give the ball to daddy'.

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.

Equipment for toilet training

Potty or toilet

Children can start toilet training using a potty or the toilet. Your child might like one better than the other. Or you can encourage your child to use both.

A **potty** is easy to move around, and some children find it less scary than a toilet.

On the other hand, the **toilet** is where everybody else does wees and poos.

If your child will be using the toilet, you'll also need:

- a step or footstool – your child can use this for getting onto the toilet and resting their feet while sitting
- a smaller seat that fits securely inside the big toilet seat.

Training pants and pull-ups

Your child is more likely to understand going to the toilet if they're no longer wearing a nappy. So it might be time to get some training pants and/or pull-ups:

- **Training pants** are absorbent underwear for toilet training. They're less absorbent than nappies but can hold in bigger messes like accidental poos. Once your child is wearing training pants, dress your child in clothes that are easy to take off quickly.
- **Pull-ups** might help your child get used to wearing underwear. They're more absorbent than cloth training pants and can be handy if you're going out.

Underpants

You could let your child choose some underpants. This can be an exciting step.



Getting out of nappies is a big move for your child. If you celebrate it, the transition will be easier.

Preparing your child for toilet training

Well before you start toilet training, you can prepare your child for this big step. Here are some ideas:

- Start teaching 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 watch you or other trusted family members using the toilet, and talk about what you’re doing.
- Once or twice a day, start putting training pants on your child – this helps your child understand the feeling of wetness.
- Make sure your child is eating plenty of fibre and drinking lots of water, so your child doesn’t get constipated. Constipation (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/health-daily-care/toileting/constipation>) can make toilet training harder.

Getting started with toilet training

It’s best to **start toilet training 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.

And it’s a good idea to **start toilet training on a day when you have no plans to leave the house.**

When to take your child to the toilet

- Try to make toileting part of your child’s regular daily routine (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/family-life/routines-rituals-rules/family-routines>). For example, encourage your child to use the potty or toilet in the morning, and before or after snacks and meals.
- Encourage your child to go to the toilet when they show signs like wriggling around, passing wind, going quiet or moving away from you. But don’t force your child to go.
- Ask your child about going to the toilet when they change activities. For example, you could remind your child to go to the toilet before they sit down for lunch.
- If your child doesn’t do a wee or poo after 3-5 minutes of sitting on the potty or toilet, let your child get off the toilet. It’s best not to sit your child on the toilet for too long, because this will feel like punishment.

How to encourage your child

- [Praise](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/connecting-communicating/connecting/praise) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/connecting-communicating/connecting/praise>) your child for trying. You could say, 'Well done for sitting on the potty'. Gradually reduce the praise as your child masters each part of the process.
- If your child misses the toilet, try not to get frustrated. Just clean up without comments or fuss.

How to dress your child

- Start using underpants or training pants all the time. Use nappies only at night and during daytime sleeps.
- Dress children in clothes that are easy to take off – for example, trousers with elastic waistbands. In warmer weather, you could leave your child in underpants when you're at home.

How to keep your child clean and hygienic

- 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 you could float a ping pong ball in the toilet for him to aim at. Or he might prefer to sit to do a wee. This can be less messy.
- Teach your child [how to wash hands](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/health-daily-care/hygiene/hand-washing-in-pictures) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/health-daily-care/hygiene/hand-washing-in-pictures>) after using the toilet.



Children learn to use the toilet at their own pace. It might take days, weeks or months. And it might take longer for poos than wees. Your child will get there eventually, so stay positive about your child's achievements. Too much tension or stress can upset everyone, and your child might avoid going to the toilet.

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. It's also helpful to have a spare change of underpants and clothes for your child when you're out. You might also need a waterproof bag or plastic bag 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 your child is toilet training. Your child will probably need an adult's help to use the toilet or potty.

Setbacks and accidents while toilet training

Accidents and setbacks are part of toilet training.

Children might get upset because of an accident or setback. If this happens, **reassure your child 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 they say they need the toilet straight away. They might be right!
- If you're sure your child hasn't done a poo or wee in a while, remind them that they might need to go. Your child might be too busy doing an activity to go to the toilet.
- Check whether your child wants to go to the toilet during a long playtime or before an outing. If your child 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.



It might help to know that daytime wetting (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/urinary-incontinence>) isn't considered a problem until it's happening regularly in children older than five years. If you're concerned about how your child is adapting to toilet training, check with your GP (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/general-practitioner>) or child and family health nurse (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/child-family-health-nurse>).

Staying dry overnight

It can take toilet-trained children months or even years to become dry at night.

The main sign that your child is becoming dry overnight is a dry nappy first thing in the morning. When you notice this starting to happen, you can try stopping nappies at night.

[Bedwetting \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/health-daily-care/toileting/bedwetting\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/health-daily-care/toileting/bedwetting) is common, even 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.

References

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External links

- [Continence Foundation of Australia \(http://www.continence.org.au/\)](http://www.continence.org.au/)

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First 1000 days

The first 1000 days of life from conception to two years is key to lifelong health and wellbeing. Find out what children need.

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/first-1000-days>)

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