

Toilet Training and Additional Learning Needs

A key message would be that if your child has additional learning needs, it does not necessarily mean they can't be toilet trained - do not assume they will be a lifelong nappy wearer. It can feel like a big challenge, but it's important not to put off toilet training for too long. It is useful to remember that children are learning all the time, and they may be learning that wee and poo goes in a nappy.

Don't wait for them to give some sign of readiness - some children never will, but that doesn't mean they won't be able to do it.

It's often tempting to wait until they are older as there may be lots of other challenges to deal with when they are younger. However, the longer they continue to wear nappies for, the harder it will be to introduce a new place to wee and poo.

Make sure your bathroom is welcoming and that the toilet is more child friendly to entice your child in.

Your child will need to sit safely and comfortably on a potty or a suitable children's toilet seat. Their feet need to be firmly supported on a step, with their feet flat and high enough so their knees are above their hips.

Be mindful it is sometimes hard for children to understand transition from potty to toilet, so you may want to consider just using the toilet with seat insert and foot stool from the start.

Before commencing a toilet training programme, it's important your child practices sitting on the toilet every day, they may not want to sit for long, just a few seconds, but this will hopefully increase over time for longer periods.

REMEMBER: Don't forget boys should be taught to sit down to wee as well as girls.

When your child is familiar with sitting on the toilet, and are happy to sit for a few minutes, they're ready to start a toilet training programme.



Planning a Toilet Training Programme

The first step is to identify if there is any pattern to your child's bowel actions. Use this information to guide toileting times. If there isn't, plan to sit your child on the toilet 20-30 minutes after meal times (this is when they are most likely to poo) and before bed.

The next step is to work out how often they do a wee. If it's every 2 hours, start sitting them on the toilet every 1½ hours.

With the above information you can make a timetable, this will ensure that everyone who looks after your child will know their toileting times. You will need to build the timetable around existing routines.

Dress your child in clothes that are easy to pull up and down, avoid zips and buttons. Practise getting dressed and undressed. Also choose ones that are easy to wash and dry.....accidents will happen.

Take your child with you when you are buying pants/knickers, let them choose what pants/knickers they would like. Buy lots, they will have accidents. To help your child get used to the feeling of wearing pants/knickers, practise wearing them for short periods of time.

Work out what words you will use for wee/poo/toilet etc and how you will communicate 'toilet time'. Also, what pictures or symbols you will show them to communicate that it is time to go to the toilet.

It's a good idea to collect some toys for your child to play with while they sit on the toilet. Collect toys that your child likes and keep these in the bathroom just for toileting.

Reward system - reward achievable goals, such as washings hands, sitting on the toilet etc. Remember, rewards need to be instant to ensure your child connects the reward with what they have just done.

PATIENCE IS KEY!!

Visual Support

Some children with addition learning needs may find it easier to understand and process visual information. Visual support can be anything from objects of reference, signs, symbols, pictures, or photographs. Some children may be using some of these already as part of their day-to-day life.



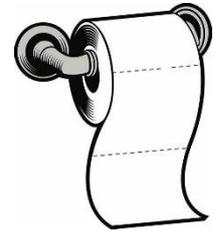
An agreement will need to be made on what kind of visual support to use. The type of visual support should match the child's level of understanding and interest. Pictures, symbols or photos should be chosen to help the child learn what they are being asked to do. A step-by-step visual support resource would be helpful for some, which includes a range of images showing children the steps in the toilet process.

There is also a range of cartoons and books for children that illustrate clearly that wee and poo go down the toilet and what happens to it. These can be found in bookshops or on YouTube.

Some children may need visual support introduced gradually, with help to understand the words that relate to them and the activities they describe. Showing or placing the visual support by the action may help the child to understand. The images can be gradually combined into short sequences of action, to help the child know what comes next.

Toilet Awareness

Some children who still wear nappies, will often have no awareness of feeling wet or soiled. Nowadays, most disposable nappies are so absorbent that they ensure that there is no moisture in contact with the skin, so the child does not receive any physical sensation that they are wet. If you have a child who doesn't show any awareness of feeling wet or soiled, the following things could be helpful:



- Nappy liner inside the nappy
- A piece of kitchen roll inside the nappy
- Pants worn inside the nappy
- Going without a nappy or pants on a sunny day in the garden
- Starting to wear pants for a short time in the day; this time could be gradually increase.

Many children may not have learnt what toilets and bathrooms are for. They may not have seen other people use the toilet because they may have still been wearing nappies and been changed elsewhere, such as their bedroom or the living room at home, or in a side-room or medical room at school.

Things that may help a child to understand can include:

- If possible, always change their nappy in the bathroom. This can help a child learn that toilet activity takes place there.
- Show the child how the poo is emptied from the nappy into the toilet, this will help a child learn where poo is supposed to go. If possible, encourage the child to help - by flushing the toilet or waving goodbye to the poo.
- Some families have an open-door policy in the bathroom, the child can then see other people using the toilet. For some children this can be a useful part of preparation, but some children may have difficulty applying behaviour they see in others to themselves.

The aim of any toilet training programme is to teach a child to be as independent as their needs allow.

It is important to plan and think about the clothing that will be easy for them to take on and off when needed. A starting point may be getting used to wearing different clothes. It may take time for some children to get used to wearing trousers and learn to undo them and pull them down. Girls may need to get used to wearing skirts and lifting them up. Some children may need to be taught undressing and dressing skills, including physically putting a hand over theirs to help to show them the movements needed. Breaking down the steps and teaching them in reverse order (backward chaining). In practice this involves getting the child to complete the last part of a task themselves, and then work backwards, so they complete a little bit more of the task each time:

Stage 1 - pull up trousers as far as their hips, they do the last little bit.

Stage 2 - pull up trousers halfway up the thighs, they do the rest.

Stage 3 - pull up trousers just above the knees, they do the rest.....etc.

This approach is good for building their self-esteem, because it gives them the sense of achievement from finishing the task.

Useful websites:



The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity

[Home - ERIC](#)