

### "My child is constipated"

Children vary a lot in how often they pass bowel motions. Some children go more than once a day, some go once a day and some go once every two or three days. All of these are quite normal. If your child passes hard bowel motions once a week or less, it is likely that he is constipated. He may not want to use the potty or toilet, in case it hurts him. Make sure that he drinks a lot and eats high fibre foods such as wholegrain cereals (weetabix, shredded wheat, porridge), wholemeal bread, brown rice, beans and peas. If the problem carries on, talk to your health visitor or family doctor.

### Good luck!

**If you have any questions or concerns about your child's potty and toilet training, please talk to your health visitor or GP.**



This booklet was produced by Psychologists and based on information supplied by Wakefield Community Health NHS Trust and Wakefield Health Promotion Department and adapted for use by Dorset community health services.

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## Potty and toilet training

A guide for parents



Information and advice for parents preparing their children to use the potty or toilet.

## Potty and toilet training: a guide for parents

**This information booklet is for parents preparing their children to use the potty or toilet. Here are some suggestions which may be of help.**

*For convenience and clarity of text, the word "he" is used throughout. Please read "she" if your child is female.*

### When should I start?

Choosing the right time to start potty training is very important. It's the key to easy training. There is no set age by which a child should be dry and clean. A lot of children become potty trained between the ages of two and three. Some children are ready before two years and others are not ready until after three years. Older people may not agree with this.

Your child is ready for potty or toilet training when all of the following happen:

#### 1.) **His body is ready**

**Your child can control his bladder and bowel.**

Children develop at different rates. It makes sense to start training when your child has control over his bladder and bowel actions. Your child has control when nappies are often dry after several hours. Regular bowel motions, or going at the same time every day, do not always mean that a child has control.

### Common problems which can occur during potty / toilet training

Some children take to potty training very easily, but quite often problems do occur. Some problems are listed as follows.

#### "My child won't use the potty"

This can often happen. It can happen because training was started too early. If your child will not use a potty, the best thing is to stop training for a month or two. He will be more likely to use the potty later on if he has not been forced to sit on it.

#### "My child was potty trained, but has started wetting / soiling again"

This is also a common problem, even when a child has been potty trained for some time. Sometimes a child even wants nappies back on. These problems are often due to changes in the child's life, such as moving house, the birth of a new baby or starting nursery. When a child has got used to the change, the problem often goes away.

#### Remember:

Don't get upset or angry with your child, even if he seems to be wetting or soiling on purpose. If you do feel angry (lots of soiled pants can certainly be unpleasant), try not to show these feelings to your child. Praise or reward your child for any dry times during the day even if he is wet the rest of the day. Also praise any times when he does use the potty or toilet - even if it is not used for the rest of the day.

## Throwing away the nappies

Some parents and children like to stop using nappies when the potty training has started. This can make outings difficult. Taking the potty along can help. Remember that your child will have 'accidents' during training. This often happens when he is busy playing or doing something and he can't reach the potty in time. If he is upset by this, comfort him and don't get cross. Accidents cannot be avoided and he is **not** doing it on purpose to annoy you!

## Introducing the toilet

When your child is using the potty properly, you can introduce him to the toilet. Some parents find it helps to move the potty closer to the bathroom in small steps. You could move it into the hall first, then onto the landing, then into the toilet or bathroom. Don't rush. Wait until he seems happy with the potty in one place before moving it a bit further. These steps also teach your child to hold on for a bit longer each time. Some children may go straight to the toilet while others take longer.

## Using the toilet

Sometimes children are scared of the toilet. They may even think that scary things are down it! Make sure your child feels safe and comfortable on the toilet. Hold him on or use a trainer seat. A step to rest his feet on or to stand on also helps. Boys can learn how to stand to wee by watching a man or older boy in the family. Remember to keep praising him for how he is doing.

## 2.) His mind is ready

### Your child knows he is wet or soiled.

A child is ready when he tugs at a wet or dirty nappy, or even takes it off. He may also tell you that he needs changing. These are signs that he knows what has happened and wants to do something about it.

## 3.) Your family is ready

Potty training needs time and effort. Start when there are no big changes in family life, such as holidays, moving house or the birth of a new baby. Some parents find it easier to start in the Spring or Summer, when children wear fewer clothes.

## Important tip:

Don't feel pushed into starting training by other people. If your child is not ready, then potty training will probably be a struggle. This could cause a lot of bad feeling between you and your child. You can avoid problems if you are careful about choosing the right time to start.

## A note on night-time dryness

Being dry during the day and during the night are different skills. Most children learn to be dry during the day before being dry at night. At least 15 per cent of five year old children wet the bed regularly, even when they are dry during the day.



## How should I start?

### First steps

#### Introduce the potty

Your child has to learn what the potty is for. Having the potty around helps him to become used to it. Tell him what it's for with simple words. Most children use a potty before using the toilet, but some children like to use the toilet from the start.

#### Leave nappies off

Most children enjoy not wearing a nappy at times. There are bound to be 'accidents' when you leave your child's nappy off for periods of time. But this will help you to see how long he can last before he wets or soils. You will also be able to tell whether he knows when he needs to go.

Don't worry if your child plays with his urine or bowel motions. Children want to know what their bodies produce and don't think of it as being dirty.

#### On the potty

The next step is to encourage your child to sit on the potty. If he gets upset or refuses, it may be that he is not ready. Wait a few more weeks before trying again.

Sit your child on the potty when he shows you that he needs to wee. He might tell you or point to his private parts. You may also know that he usually wees a certain time after having a drink, say 20 minutes.

Sit him on the potty for a short time to start with - five minutes at the most. It is very important that this is pleasant and comfortable. Talk to him, let him look at a book or play with a toy. Use a trainer seat if you are putting him on the toilet.

#### Take it slowly

It may be a few days or weeks before your child does anything in the potty. This is common and quite normal. Make sure your child knows you are pleased with him just for sitting on the potty, even if he doesn't do anything in it. If you are cross or disappointed, this will put him off sitting on the potty the next time. It is best for boys to start sitting on the potty. If they don't sit to wee, it may be harder for them to learn to sit for bowel motions. They can learn to stand to wee later. Often a child wees as soon as you take him off the potty, without having done anything in it. This does not mean that he did it on purpose. It just means that you have not caught him at the right moment - better luck next time! And remember not to get cross!

#### Making progress

Once your child sits on the potty for short periods, you can start to sit him on it four or five times a day. About five minutes each time is enough. Try to time these to catch his wees. Some parents keep a potty upstairs and downstairs to do this. If you give your child lots of praise when he does anything in the potty, he will soon learn that it is the best place to go. Getting cross with your child or punishing him for not using his potty will make him scared of using it.

#### Parting with nappies

Some children do not like to part with their nappies. It can be a nice feeling for them to wee in a nappy. If so, introduce him to the potty in small steps. Sit him on the potty with his nappy on when he wees or does a bowel motion. When he is happy to do this, undo the nappy while he is on the potty. Praising him just for sitting on the potty will help him get used to it.