

Toileting:

Being toilet trained is a skill that children need to develop independence, self-esteem, and confidence to thrive at school. Ofsted guidelines state that every child should be able to go to the toilet independently by the age of five.

However, it's a developmental milestone that can create stress for families. Being able to assess a child's readiness, knowing how our bowel and bladder works and how to keep them healthy is vital for supporting children.

A consistent approach to training at home and at school during this stage, including language used and deciding when to go nappy free makes things easier for the child.

Here are some top tips to help:

- Think about the toilet environment – children need to feel relaxed to go! Make them a pleasant place to be with books, bubbles, posters, singing songs etc.
- Use toilet seats and footstools to help children feel secure and get into a good squat position (feet supported, knees higher than hips).
- Encourage boys to sit down to wee so they can empty their bladder fully. This also provides opportunities to poo that can be missed when standing.
- Avoid encouraging children to empty their bladder too often – this can get very boring for them and doesn't allow their bladder to fill properly or learn to hold more. On average children should be able to go 1.5 - 2 hours between wees.
- Work with the body's natural, prime pooing time e.g. 20 - 30 minutes after eating. Encourage a sit on the potty or toilet after lunch not before!
- Make sure children have a drink at regular intervals throughout the day. This will help them to recognise their bladder signals as well as keeping their stools soft.
- Always reward effort and not just success.

Lots of children only want to poo in a nappy or start to withhold poo when they start training. Children who will poo in a nappy are completely normal. Lots of children go through a phase, usually soon after potty training has begun, when they refuse to poo in the potty or toilet and insist on using a nappy.

Other children go through a phase of refusing to wee in a potty or toilet. You'll find information and techniques below will be relevant to them too.

Some boys and girls will work it out for themselves, but without intervention some would happily poo in a nappy for years.

Here are some tips to help you break the pooing in a nappy habit.

If your child insists on using a nappy to poo, **DON'T SAY NO**, or they will simply try to avoid pooing. Withholding the stools will lead to constipation – which is definitely something to avoid! Let them have the nappy or just do their poo, and work on gradually changing their behavior.

So where do you start?

1. Constipation

Constipation often plays a part in potty/toilet avoidance. A big, hard painful poo will scare the child, and to stop it happening again they simply hold on. Make sure any constipation is really well managed before attempting to change toileting behavior.

2. Making the toilet less scary

Some children are frightened of the toilet itself. This fear will need to be overcome before they can start learning to sit on it. If your child is scared of the flush, start by flushing it while they stand by the bathroom door, then gradually ask them to come a little closer. When they are near enough, encourage them to put just a little bit of toilet paper in the toilet to flush away.

If they are worried about water splashing back when they use the toilet, show them how to put a layer of toilet paper over the water in the toilet bowl.

Create a game with a few bottles of food colouring! Add a few drops to the cistern, then ask your child to guess what colour the water in the toilet will change to when they flush.

3. Learning to sit on the toilet

To start with, sitting on the potty/toilet should have nothing to do with pooing. The emphasis should be completely on relaxed, happy sitting – when you ask them to do so. To start with this may be a five second sit, once a day, fully clothed. That's fine! Reward them for sitting, and resist the temptation to wee or poo!

The key now is moving forward gradually, so each little step forward is an achievable goal. You plan when the potty/toilet sitting should take place – aim for 20 - 30 minutes after each meal as that is the best time to poo, and before bed. Make sure your child's bottom and feet are firmly supported.

Over time you'll build up a regular toileting programme, with your child sitting on the potty/toilet for 5 - 10 minutes four times a day. Keep a bag of special toys in the bathroom ready so they look forward to exploring what's there whenever they sit on the loo.

Remember to reward every potty/toilet sit with your agreed system.

4. Next steps

Once you've made sure your child is not complicated, and they can happily sit on the potty/toilet for 5 - 10 minutes, you're ready to begin working towards them pooing in the right place.

The key thing is to work out where they like to poo in their nappy, for example behind the sofa or in the corner of their bedroom, and where you want them to poo – on the potty/toilet. Put as many tiny steps as possible in between until eventually they reach the potty. Each step should be an achievable goal.

Be patient – this may take a long time, but it will be worth it! Read the examples below for ideas of how other parents encouraged their children to move step-by-step towards the potty.

Remember to build in washing their hands thoroughly after sitting on the potty/toilet. Model this for them and why not sing a nursery rhyme to help do a thorough job. Hand washing is an important life skill and helps us stay healthy and prevents the spread of germs.