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Pregnancy and baby

## How to potty train

Using a potty is a new skill for your child to learn. It's best to take it slowly and go at your child's pace. Being patient with them will help them get it right, even if you sometimes feel frustrated.

Children are able to control their bladder and bowels when they're physically ready and when they want to be dry and clean. Every child is different, so it's best not to compare your child with others.

Bear in mind that most children can control their bowels before their bladder.

- By age one, most babies have stopped doing poos at night.
- By age two, some children will be dry during the day, but this is still quite early.
- By age three, 9 out of 10 children are dry most days – even then, all children have the odd accident, especially when they're excited, upset or absorbed in something else.
- By age four, most children are reliably dry during the day.

It usually takes a little longer for children to [learn to stay dry throughout the night](#). Although most learn this between the ages of three and five, up to one in five children aged five sometimes wet the bed.

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## When to start potty training

Remember, you can't force your child to use a potty. If they're not ready, you won't be able to make them use it. In time, they will want to use one – most children won't want to go to school in nappies any more than you would want them to.

In the meantime, the best thing you can do is to encourage the behaviour you want.

Most parents start thinking about potty training when their child is between two and two-and-a-half, but there's no perfect time. Some people find it easier to start in the summer, when there are fewer clothes to take off and washed clothes dry more quickly.

Try potty training when there are no great disruptions or changes to your child's or your family's routine. It's important to stay consistent, so you don't confuse your child.

If you go out, take the potty with you, so your child understands that you'd like them to wee or poo in the potty every time they need to go. Check that any other people who look after your child can help with potty training in the same way as you.

You can try to work out when your child is ready. There are a number of signs that your child is starting to develop bladder control:

- they know when they've got a wet or dirty nappy
- they get to know when they're passing urine and may tell you they're doing it
- the gap between wetting is at least an hour (if it's less, potty training may fail, and at the very least will be extremely hard work for you)
- they show they need to pee by fidgeting or going somewhere quiet or hidden
- they know when they need to pee and may say so in advance

Potty training is usually fastest if your child is at the last stage before you start the training. If you start earlier, be prepared for a lot of accidents as your child learns.

They also need to be able to sit on the potty and get up from it when they're done, and follow your instructions.

## Getting ready for potty training

Using a potty will be new to your child, so get them used to the idea gradually. It's usually easier if boys start by sitting on the potty before they switch to standing up later on.

Talk about your child's nappy changes as you do them, so they understand wee and poo and what a wet nappy means. If you always change their nappy in the bathroom when you're at home, they will learn that's the place where people go to the loo. Helping you flush the toilet and wash their hands is also a good idea.

Leave a potty where your child can see it and explain what it's for. Children learn by watching and copying. If you've got an older child, your younger child may see them using it, which will be a great help. It helps to let your child see you using the toilet and explain what you're doing. Using your child's toys to show what the potty is for can also help.

You could see if your child is happy to sit on the potty for a moment, just to get used to it, when you're changing their nappy, especially when you're getting them dressed for the day or ready for bed at night.

## How to start potty training

Keep the potty in the bathroom. If that's upstairs, keep another potty downstairs so your child can reach the potty easily wherever they are. The idea is to make sitting on the potty part of everyday life for your child.

Encourage your child to sit on the potty after meals, because digesting food often leads to an urge to do a poo. Having a book to look at or toys to play with can help your child sit still on the potty.

If your child regularly does a poo at the same time each day, leave their nappy off and suggest that they go in the potty. If your child is even the slightest bit upset by the idea, just put the nappy back on and leave it a few more weeks before trying again.

Encouraging them to use the potty to wee will help build their confidence for when they are ready to use it to poo.

As soon as you see that your child knows when they're going to pee, encourage them to use their potty. If your child slips up, just mop it up and wait for next time. It takes a while for them to get the hang of it.

If you don't make a fuss when they have an accident, they won't feel anxious and worried, and are more likely to be successful the next time. Put them in clothes that are easy to change and avoid tights and clothes with zips or lots of buttons.

Your child will be delighted when he or she succeeds. A little praise from you will help a lot. It can be quite tricky to get the balance right between giving praise and making a big deal out of it. Don't give sweets as a reward, but you could try using a sticker chart.

## Potty training pants and pull-ups

Disposable or washable potty training pants (also called pull-ups) can be handy when you start potty training and can give children confidence when it's time to swap nappies for "grown-up" pants. They don't soak up wee as well as disposable nappies, so your child will find it easier to tell when they are wet.

Training pants should be a step towards normal pants, rather than a replacement for nappies. Encourage your child to keep their training pants dry by using the potty.

If your child is not ready to stop wearing nappies and it's hard for them to know when they've done a wee, you can put a piece of folded kitchen paper inside their nappy. It will stay wet and should help your child learn that weeing makes you feel wet.

## Night-time potty training

Focus on getting your child potty trained during the day before you start leaving their nappy off at night.

If your child's nappy is dry or only slightly damp when your child wakes for a few mornings in a row, they may be ready for night-time potty training.

Ask your child to use the potty last thing before they go to bed and make sure it's close by, so they can use it if they need to wee in the night. There are bound to be a few accidents, so a waterproof sheet to protect your child's mattress is a good idea.

Just like daytime potty training, it's important to praise your child for success. If things aren't going well, stick with nappies at night for a while longer and try again in a few weeks' time.

## Using the toilet instead of the potty

Some children start using the toilet instead of the potty earlier than others.

A child's trainer seat that clips onto the toilet can help make your child feel safer and more confident on the toilet. A step for your child to rest their feet on gets your child in a good position for doing a poo.

If you have a boy, you need to make sure they sit on the toilet every day to poo. Once they have started weeing standing up it's easy to forget about poeing, and this could lead to [constipation](#).

## Potty training with a disabled child

Some children with a long-term illness or disability find it more difficult to learn to use a potty or toilet. This can be challenging for them and for you, but it's important not to avoid potty training for too long.

Contact a Family have a parents' guide on [potty training with a disabled child \(PDF, 762kb\)](#). Visit the [Contact a Family website](#) for further support and ways of getting in touch with other parents with a disabled child.

## More information and support

You can contact [ERIC, The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity](#), for information on potty training. You can also call the ERIC helpline on 0845 370 8008 from Monday to Thursday 10am to 2pm, or email a question to [helpline@eric.org.uk](mailto:helpline@eric.org.uk).

- [ERIC's guide to potty training](#)
- [Institute of Health Visiting parent tips: toilet training \(PDF, 753kb\)](#)

Talk to your GP or health visitor to get some guidance. They may refer you to a clinic for expert help.

People talking about potty training



Potty Training...

Okay, so we are heading into potty training time... any tips from those...

6 replies



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My daughter is 2years 7months old and is pretty much a master at using the...

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