

# Stepping Stones to Toilet Training

## Introduction

Toilet training is a routine part of growing up for most children, but for children with neurological impairment (disorders which affect the brain, spinal cord, nerves, voluntary and involuntary muscles) or learning difficulties, it can bring additional challenges. Research suggests that the average age for children with cerebral palsy to gain control over bladder and bowel movements is 5.5 years old compared to those without a disability who may attain control at 2.5 years of age. Night time bladder and bowel control may be more difficult for your child to achieve. Depending on the level of your child's disability there may be other factors such as communication, understanding or motivation which will have an effect on their ability to be toilet trained.<sup>1</sup>



How do I know if my child is ready to be toilet trained?

- Dry nappies or pads between routine changes (shows bladder control)
- Your child will become aware of when they have had an accident or their behaviour will change (pointing or pulling at nappy)
- Able to sit on the toilet with assistance if required



## How can I toilet train my child?

1

### Getting used to the bathroom

- Change your child within the toilet environment to help them develop the connection between urine, faeces and the toilet
- After eating let your child sit on the toilet or potty, this may help to establish a toileting routine
- Children that can stand with minimal support – change them standing upright when possible so they get used to pulling their pants and trousers up or down

2

### Learning what I need to do

- Let your child get used to sitting on the toilet or potty
- Give your child the opportunity to learn and recognise toileting words - toilet, potty, wee and poo
- If your child has difficulty with verbal communication - put in place communication cards or visuals that they can use to inform you when they need to go to the toilet
- Give them clear instructions as to what they should do on the toilet ie) 'wee' and 'poo' rather than 'use the toilet'
- Let your child help with clothing adjustment - let your child wear clothes that are easy to adjust.



### 3

#### Be aware of your child's behaviours and routine

- Identify your child's routine - what times of the day do they eat? How long can they stay dry for (May last between 1.5 or 2 hours)? When are they most likely to need to go to the toilet?
- Know your child - they may show signs of discomfort, or change in behaviour when they are urinating or having a bowel movement
- Change your child out of nappies into disposable pants
- Wash their hands after using the toilet

### 4

#### Using the toilet

- Your child should be passing urine or faeces in the toilet
- Give praise when your child uses the toilet successfully - toilet training rewards
- Accidents should not be punished

### 5

#### Learning to stay dry at night

- Leave a dimmed light on if your child needs to go to the toilet at night, or leave their bedroom door open so they can call if they require assistance
- Children by the ages of 5-6 years may be dry at night or have control over bowel movements<sup>2</sup>

Try to toilet train your child during their normal daily routine and when there is a minimal amount of tension and stress within the home.

Remind your child frequently about using the toilet, and remember that accidents will happen.



What can I do if my child has  
Sensory processing issues?

If your child is sensitive to toilet paper, try using baby wipes or a flannel. If your child has difficulty sitting in one place for a period of time, try distracting them with music or a favourite toy. If your child wears a weighted vest to help keep them calm let them wear it when seated on the toilet or potty. Position a handrail on the wall so your child can support themselves and if their legs do not touch the floor a step placed underneath their feet will help provide further support<sup>3</sup>

If your child does not like the feel of the toilet seat against their skin, try a padded toilet seat cover or different textured cover. Your child will need to adapt to the transition from wearing nappies to sitting on the toilet or potty. If your child has difficulty communicating their need to use the toilet a communication board or pictures may help.



## Top Tips



Monitor your child's toileting routine when in nappies



Allow your child to become familiar with the bathroom and make associations



Establish a routine between eating and toileting



Use toileting words during conversation with your child, so they recognise them



Let your child practice sitting on the toilet or potty



Let your child help with adjustment of clothing before and after toileting if able to do so



Bring a change of clothes with you when leaving the house

For specific toileting advice for your child contact your Occupational Therapist or GP for further information.

Useful resource: For children who suffer from constipation or are scared of bowel movements - check out the following link. "[Mr Poo goes to Poland](#)"

## References

- 1) WRIGHT, A, J., FLTECHER, O., SCRUTTON, D., BAIRD, G., 2016. Bladder and bowel continence in bilateral cerebral palsy: A population study. *Journal of pediatric urology*. Elsevier
- 2) Rodgers, J., 2010. One step at a time: how to toilet train children with learning disabilities , *Nursing Times*. 106 (47).
- 3) Children and young people's health services Cambridgeshire sensory strategies: toilet training (April 2015)