Government of Western Australia
Child and Adolescent Health Service
WA Country Health Service

toilet training



Helping your child learn to use the potty or toilet is a big step for you both.

The secret is to watch and wait for signs that your child is ready.

For your toddler, it's a big step from being a baby to being a 'big kid' – but don't worry if it doesn't all go smoothly.

When will my child be ready?

Most children are not ready to control their poo and wee (bowels and bladder) until they are about 2 years old, and some not until they are 3.

Often the first sign is when he tells you while he is doing wee or poo, or has just done it.

If you praise him for telling you, he will learn to tell you before he does it.

Your toddler is ready to use the toilet or potty when he:

- starts taking an interest when you (or others) use the toilet
- pulls at his wet or dirty nappies
- can hold on for long enough to get to the potty or the toilet
- knows when he has to do a wee or poo before he does it
- tells you that he doesn't want to wear nappies anymore
- understands that he's meant to use the toilet or potty.

Wait until your child is ready.

You're less likely to have toilet training problems if you don't start too early.

- Boys are often later than girls.
- Some children lean to control poo first.

  For others, control over wee happens first.



Getting ready to toilet train

Teach your child the words she needs, such as 'wet', 'dry', 'wee', 'poo', 'it's coming'. Choose words that you are comfortable with.

Choose either a potty or the toilet – or a mixture of both. Find out what your child would prefer.

- A potty is mobile and less scary than the toilet for some children. Remember to take it with you if your child is not happy to use a toilet.
- If you're using the toilet, you need a special toilet seat and a footstool or step (such as a couple of bricks) so that your child can get up to the toilet by herself, and feel safe and relaxed.

  She needs to be relaxed to let the wee or poo out.

  - Make sure that she can get to it by herself (door open, light on at night), and that it's always ready for her.
  - Remind the rest of the family that there's no time to set it up when she really has to go NOW!
- Some toddlers are afraid of being flushed down the toilet – you can use a potty, let her flush the toilet with you, or flush when she's out of the way.
- Make sure your toilet area is safe. Keep household cleaners, deodorants and toiletries out of reach.
- If you feel comfortable, let your toddler come into the toilet with you, and talk about what you are doing.
- Start by using underpants or training pants during the day (except at night and during daytime sleeps). Let your toddler choose her underpants to make it more fun.
- Make sure your child is wearing clothes that are easy to get on and off, and wash.
- Toilet training is often easier in warm weather because there's less clothing to remove. You might like to let her go without pants or nappies for some of the time.
- Learn your child's signals so you're ready to guide her to the potty or toilet in time.

Starting toilet training

If you think your child is ready, choose a time when you can stay at home, and have lots of time and patience to give him your full attention.

- ✘ **It's best to delay toilet training if there are other changes going on**, such as a new baby or your toddler is starting childcare.
- Leave the potty where your child can see and touch it – try sitting teddy on the potty 'to do a wee'.
- When your child is doing a poo in his nappy, say, 'I think you're doing a poo'.
- Later, watch for signs that he is about to do a wee or poo (such as stopping very still for a moment) and guide him to the potty or toilet. Say something like 'Let's see if there's a wee coming'. Eventually he will know and get there himself.



Lots of praise

If your child tells you before she does a wee or poo, thank her and take her to the toilet or potty straight away. Toddlers can't 'hold on' for more than a few seconds.

Even if she doesn't get there in time, praise her for pulling down her pants, trying to get to the toilet, or sitting on the toilet.

Praise her for what she's achieved – 'You did that really well'.

- ✘ Don't make your toddler sit on a potty or toilet for long periods of time.

  Your toddler will think she is being punished and it does not help toilet training.
- Reward successes with cuddles. Say things like 'I am proud of you for trying'.
- Be positive and praise small successes. Learning to use the toilet is a new skill and can be a difficult one.

It is common for toddlers to relax and 'let go' as soon as they stand to walk away from the potty. She may not be quite ready for toilet training if this is happening a lot.

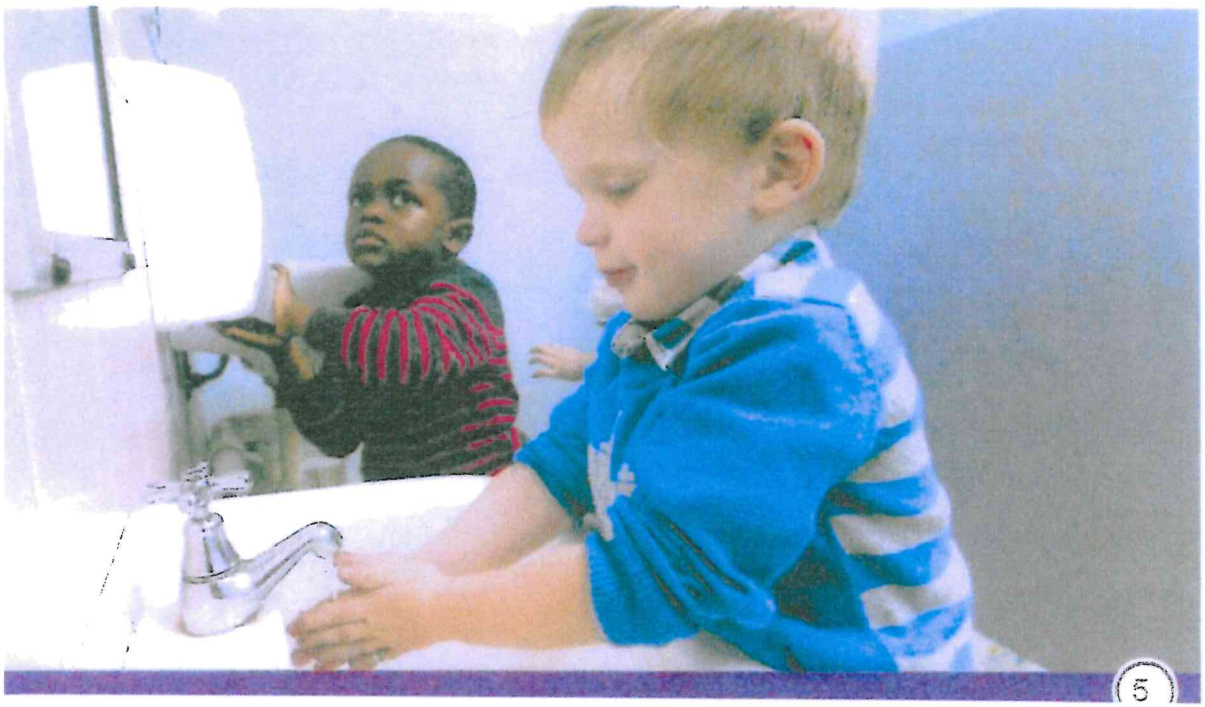
Outside the house

- It's easier to stay home for the first few days when you start toilet training.
- When you have to go out, it's a good idea to learn where the nearest toilets are at the shops or the park.

  When you get there, ask your child if he needs to go.
- If you're visiting, take the potty or toilet seat with you.
- It's OK to use a nappy for long trips or nights away from home.
- Keep a spare change of underpants and clothes for your child when you're out until he's very confident about using the toilet.

Hygiene

- Teach girls to wipe themselves from front to back to avoid getting poo into the vagina.
- Teach boys to shake their penis after a wee to get rid of any drops. Boys who are not circumcised need to be careful as the foreskin may trap some wee.
- It may help, in the early stages, to float a ping pong ball in the toilet for little boys to aim at.
- Your toddler doesn't have the skills to wipe her bottom properly, so you will need to do this with her until she can get it right.
- Teach your toddler to always wash her hands after using the toilet or potty. Make it a fun activity.



Toilet training troubles

Learning to control bowel and bladder can be a big task for your toddler and there will be 'accidents' and problems.

Remember that your toddler can't 'hold on' to a wee or poo that is ready to come out.

If he's busy playing, he won't always notice that the wee or poo is coming until it starts to come out, or it's too late to get to the toilet.

You can expect 'accidents' while he's still learning.

Starting too soon

Starting too soon can cause problems.

You and others might want him to be ready by a certain time, such as when he turns 2 or before you go on holiday. But you really have to wait until he is ready, even if it doesn't suit your plans.

Relax

Toilet training works best when there is no pressure for you or your child.

- If you start getting stressed, wait a few weeks until things are less tense.
- If you pressure your child, learning is harder. You can't 'make' your child wee or poo, and it's even more difficult if he's upset and tense.
- Punishment does not help with toilet training.

Life changes

Any stress in your child's life, such as sickness, a new baby or starting childcare, can set things back temporarily.

Hiding when doing poo

Many children who are being toilet trained may start hiding in strange places to do a poo.

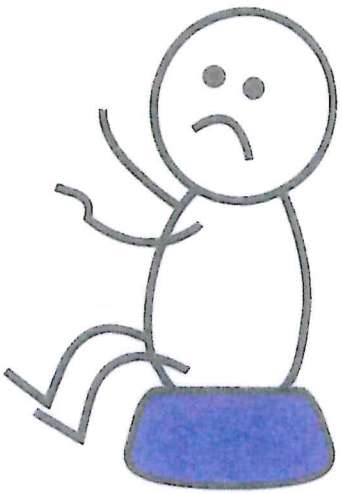
- Your child may poo behind the sofa, inside a cupboard, outside in the garden or anywhere that she feels safe.
- It is not known why children do this, and they obviously can't explain it.
- They usually stop doing it, generally without you having to do anything apart from encouraging them to do a poo in the potty or toilet.
- Check that your toddler still has easy access to the potty or toilet, including a footstool and special toilet seat if she uses the toilet.

  Try putting the potty in a more private place.
- ✗ Don't get annoyed with your toddler for doing poo in the wrong place. It will not help and can make things worse.

Spreading poo around

Doing a poo feels good, and parents show a lot of interest in poo during toilet training, so it's normal for toddlers to be interested in their own poo.

- Some toddlers get some poo on their hands and spread it around.
- This isn't nice to deal with, but your toddler is not trying to upset you.
- There are germs (viruses and bacteria) in poo, but hot water and normal household cleaners are usually enough to clean cots, walls and other furniture.



Constipation

Make sure your toddler has a healthy diet with lots of vegetables and water so he doesn't become constipated (hard poo).

- Constipation can make it hurt when a child does a poo. He might try to hold on and not be able to push it out, or become very upset.
- A warm bath can help relax the muscles – quickly pick him out of the bath, and praise him for letting the poo out even if some goes into the bath water.
- **See your doctor if the problem doesn't go away.**



Physical problems

If a toddler who has been dry during the day starts to have many wet pants again, she may have a health problem such as a urinary tract infection, or it may be a sign of some big change in her life, like a new baby in the family.

ALERT

See your doctor if you're worried, or if there are any signs of a urinary tract infection, including:

- doing wee very often
- pain when doing wee
- blood in the wee
- a child of 4 or older still wetting during the day.

When a child has never been fully dry

See your doctor if your child sometimes has wet pants by 3½ years or older.

Bedwetting

Many children still wet the bed long after they are dry during the day.

Over 1 in 10 children in the younger primary school years still wet their beds and most will grow out of it.

- Don't worry about bedwetting if your child is under 5.
- Don't make your child wash his own pants or sheets after an 'accident'. This will make him feel bad and can make the problem worse.
- Check with your doctor to make sure there is no medical problem if:
  - bedwetting continues after your child is around 5
  - your child has been dry and starts wetting again
  - one child is bedwetting at a later age than others in the family.

Check out 'Bedwetting' at www.healthywa.wa.gov.au or www.raisingchildren.net.au

Remember

- Toilet training is a big step and a new skill to learn.
- Start toilet training when your child shows she is ready.
- ✗ Don't try to set a date by which you want your child trained – it puts pressure on both of you.
- Children learn new tasks in small steps – praise each step. Don't wait until she does everything properly before praising her.
- Go at your child's pace, and don't expect too much. Accidents will happen even when children are trained, especially if they're stressed or upset.
- If there are any setbacks, stop for a few weeks and then start again.
- ✗ Don't get cross, and don't make her clean up any mess.

For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**
  www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- **Local child health nurse**
- **Local family doctor**
- **Bladder and Bowel Health Australia**
  (9am–4.00pm weekdays)
  (08) 9386 9777 (Outside metro 1800 814 925)
  www.bladderbowelhealth.org.au
- **National Continence Helpline**
  (8am–8pm weekdays – Eastern Standard Time)
  Freecall 1800 330 066*
  www.continence.org.au
- **Ngala Parenting Line** (8am–8pm everyday)
  (08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)
  www.ngala.com.au
- **Raising Children Network**
  www.raisingchildren.net.au

We've used 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes.

Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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