

Top tips for getting ready for toilet training children with Down syndrome and other learning disabilities

Achieving bladder and bowel control is a developmental skill that all children must learn in order to become toilet trained. While most typically developing children toilet train without much difficulty, this is not the case for many children with Down syndrome and other learning difficulties. Helping children develop the skills they need for toilet training before removing their nappy, makes the whole process easier for everyone. The introduction of a 'toilet skill development' programme helps children learn to use the toilet/potty. If started early many children with Down syndrome can be out of nappies wearing pants in time to start at school.

1. How do I know if my child is 'ready' for potty training?

There are no clear signs of 'readiness' for potty training. You need to begin working on the skills early and not wait for your child to give an indication of wanting to be toilet trained. Most children would happily continue to use a nappy for as long as we let them.

2. Introduce sitting on the potty/toilet when your child is about 9 months old, as part of their daily routine.

You will need a potty, a potty chair, or a toilet seat reducer and a step. Speak to your Occupational Therapist for further advice if your child has problems with balance. Your child should be well supported when sitting on the potty/toilet, with their feet on a flat surface and their knees higher than their hips.

3. Help prevent constipation.

Constipation is a common problem in children with Down syndrome. Sitting correctly (see above) helps relax the pelvic floor and makes it easier for your child to poo.

4. Try to encourage a good fluid intake throughout the day.

Offer water-based drinks at breakfast, mid-morning, lunch, mid and late afternoon, and teatime.

5. After weaning try not to give your child more than a pint of cow's milk per day.

For some children cow's milk can contribute towards constipation. Other children will drink milk rather than eating food. Five portions of fruit and vegetables a day will help prevent constipation.

6. Talk about wee and poo.

Stand your child up, when they are able to do this, while you change their nappy. Always praise them by saying 'Good girl/boy you have done a big wee/poo'. This helps them to understand wee and poo. Any solid poo to be tipped into the toilet and flushed away, so they learn where it should go.

7. Have an 'open' bathroom door policy.

When family members are going to the toilet, always say where they are going and what they are doing. This will help your child understand and recognise that everybody goes to the toilet.

For more information visit www.bbuk.org/children-young-people/children/resources/ or contact Bladder & Bowel UK helpline at bbuk@disabledliving.co.uk or telephone 0161 607 8219