

## **Understanding Toilet Refusal**

### **The child who will only poo in a nappy**



A guide for parents and carers

## Why do some children who will wee on the toilet or potty only poo in a nappy?

This is a very common problem in children who are about 2 – 4 years old and have potty trained. The reasons behind it are often not clear. It may be that they are reluctant to give up the last bits of babyhood, they may be worried about feeling the poo fall away into the potty, or there may be other problems such as constipation.

Usually there are no underlying issues and it is just your child preferring to carry on using the nappy as they always have. Your child's health visitor may have suggestions that help your child learn to poo in the potty. It is worth asking their health care professional to make sure that they do not have constipation or any another issue that might be causing the problem. If your child is constipated this will need to be treated before you try to remove the nappies.

## What will happen if I stop letting my child use a nappy?

Children can hold on to their poo for a long time. If they really do not want to use the potty or toilet, they may hold on for long enough to become constipated. If you think this has happened to your child, speak to their healthcare professional. They should suggest treatment with laxatives, to help resolve the constipation. (There is more information about constipation on the Bladder & Bowel UK website at [www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk))



## What can I do to help my child learn to use the toilet?

To prevent constipation developing your child needs to feel in control. Therefore, a programme that makes changes gradually often works well:

- Allow your child to have a nappy put on when they want to open their bowels, but keep the nappies in the bathroom.
- Take your child to the bathroom to put the nappy on and then stay there with them while the nappy is on or leave them there with a favourite book or toy, until they have done their poo.
- Remove the nappy as soon as your child has done a poo and encourage them to help empty the poo into the toilet – because that's where poo goes.
- Your child should flush the toilet and then wash and dry their hands.
- It is important that your child is standing up when the nappy is put on and taken off. This allows them to help with the process. It also lets them start to learn about and help with bottom wiping, which they cannot do if they are lying down. (It also makes it easier to do when you are out and about.)
- Once your child is in a routine of going to the bathroom to have the nappy put on and staying there with it on, the programme is moved forward. This is done by encouraging your child to sit on the toilet or potty with the nappy on.

**Your child needs to understand that Mr Poo really does want to go in the toilet!**

- Gradually encourage your child to sit on the toilet or potty for more time, until they are sitting the whole time the nappy is on.
- Stickers or other small rewards can be used to encourage your child.

When your child is happily sitting on the toilet with a nappy on to poo, you can start to work towards them pooing without a nappy. This can be done by one of the following:

- Put the nappy over the potty, or under the toilet seat so your child can still feel it is there.
- Over time the nappy is lowered, so it is not touching their bottom. Eventually you should be able to stop using the nappy. Some children do well if the nappy is replaced with toilet paper.
- Use nappies that are smaller and smaller sizes until you can tell your child that, as there are no longer any nappies that fit them, they need to start opening their bowels on the toilet or potty without the nappy. You may tell them they are now a 'big' boy/girl.
- Put the nappy on, but do not do it up. Eventually you can replace it with some kitchen roll and then toilet paper. Gradually reduce the amount of toilet paper until you are only using a couple of sheets, before being removing it completely.
- Cut a small hole in the nappy. Gradually increase the size of the hole until your child is opening their bowels through the hole.

This problem often seems as though it becomes a battle of wills – but if you have a clear consistent approach and use lots of praise and encouragement your child will learn to poo in the toilet or potty. It may be useful to have a clear timescale and outcome for the programme so everyone knows what they are aiming towards.

### **My child has additional needs – will this programme work for them?**

This programme will work well for children with additional needs. However, for some children with sensory issues or processing difficulties, they may take longer to learn to use the potty or toilet. These children may require very gradual changes over a longer period of time. Ask their healthcare professional for help and support.

You may need to think about other things that might be making your child reluctant to use the potty or toilet if they have additional needs. Some children struggle with the bathroom environment due to their sensory needs. Their occupational therapist may be able to make suggestions to help with this. Some children with processing differences, particularly children who struggle with changes to their usual routines, may need a very gradual approach, with changes made slowly.

There is more information about toilet training children with additional needs and sensory issues, including a leaflet on 'Toilet Training Children with Autism and Related Conditions' on the Bladder & Bowel UK website at <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/children-resources/>

## Further Advice

Always follow the advice given to you by your child's doctor or nurse. Talk to them if you have any concerns or questions

You may also contact the **Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline** at email: [bbbuk@disabledliving.co.uk](mailto:bbbuk@disabledliving.co.uk) or Telephone: 0161 607 8219

## Further information

There is more information about toilet training and other children's bladder and bowel issues available at: <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/children-young-people/children-resources/>

For further information about **Bladder & Bowel UK** services and resources visit our website at [www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk)

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