

# Starting school: Is your child ready?



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For many families, their child starting school is a time of mixed emotions. It is an exciting time for you and your child but may also be a daunting one, especially if your child has not yet fully toilet trained or has a diagnosed bladder or bowel condition.

To help avoid any stress or anxiety there is advice below on how you can prepare for school and support this important transition.

## The 3 Ps: Preparation; Practicing with Patience and Positivity

### Preparation

- Understanding the foundations of a healthy bladder and bowel so that you can ask your healthcare professional for help and advice if your little one has any issues, or you have any concerns.
- Understanding the skills that are needed for toilet training and start to help your child learn these. If you are using a potty, be prepared to introduce the toilet. You will need the right equipment so that your child feels safe, secure and is in a good position. Most children need a secure insert seat and a step for their feet. Starting to get used to the toilet will help your child transition to the toilet more easily later, including when they start school.
- Talk to school about any issues or concerns early. This will allow time for questions and to resolve any issues. It will also allow any time for any input from other professionals if this is needed.
- Being open and honest with where you are with toilet training/continence needs and asking the professionals working with you and your child, for more information and support as needed.
- Making sure that school understands your child's toileting and hygiene needs and the reasons for these. This may involve making sure your child has a way of indicating to their teacher/teaching assistant they need to use the toilet. It may be making sure a prompted toileting routine and changing support if required, is agreed and in place.

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- Make sure your child has the same equipment at school, that they use at home to use to support their toileting and hygiene e.g. reminder watches; protective underwear; step; toilet seat inserts; picture cue cards; picture stories; items they associate with the toilet (if used); apps and tools such as “now and next”. Now and next is a system that can help your child understand the routine for toileting skills, by prompting what they are going to do and when.
- If your child is wetting or soiling you will also need to provide spare clothing and wipes, as well as bags for soiled clothing to be returned home for washing.
- Consider asking school for a care plan, to ensure that there is clear agreement about your child’s bladder, bowel and hygiene needs while in school and how these are going to be supported. You may ask your healthcare professional to support with this process, if needed.

## Practice with patience

- Not overwhelming yourself by leaving a short time frame to work on this. Children can often learn the skills for toilet training and become clean and dry relatively quickly. However, if your child is struggling, or has a medical condition related to their bladder and bowel, you will need to manage your expectations and be prepared to take this at your child’s pace. Whilst it can feel daunting for your child not to be fully toilet trained for the start of school, school staff should support this process and work with you and your child.
- Some children find learning all the skills needed for potty or toilet training difficult. It is important to remember that children learn at different rates and in different ways. For potty or toilet training your child needs to learn several different skills before they will be successful in staying clean and dry. The more opportunity they get to practice the skills needed, the more likely they are to be successful. Every ‘accident’ is a learning opportunity. It is also important to remember that when the nappy is first removed, many children have more frequent wetting while they learn to recognise the feelings and to get to the right place. This usually gets better after a few days or weeks.

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## Positivity

Accepting the wins and being prepared to start again tomorrow. Some days will go well, and some will go not so well. Remaining positive with your child as you work through toileting and preparing for school enables them and you to stay focused and positive towards your end goal of being clean and dry. Keeping perspective on what has gone well so far enables you to progress.

Sometimes children will do well with many aspects of the toilet training but then plateau for a while. It is important to continue the toileting routines and praise the process as much as you do the outcome. So praising for dressing and undressing, washing and drying of their hands as much as you praise wee, or poo being passed in the potty/toilet.

**If you have not started working on the skills needed for toilet training with your child, or if you have started and are struggling, there is more information and advice below.**

### What is potty or toilet training?

Potty or toilet training is the process of teaching your child the set of skills that they will need to be able to wee and poo in a socially acceptable place.

### How will I know that my child is ready to start to potty or toilet train?

Many children will never give any signs that they are ready to potty or toilet train. Therefore, it is not helpful to wait for your child to seem to be ready to learn to use the potty or toilet.

Children need to be taught the skills they will need to potty or toilet train, in the same way as they need to be taught other skills, such as washing, brushing their teeth, or feeding themselves. This teaching can start at any time and, as with other developmental skills, your child should gradually become more independent with time and practice.

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When should I start teaching my child the skills, they will need to use a potty or toilet?

It is never too early or too late to introduce your child to the skills needed for potty and toilet training.

In previous generations children were introduced to the potty or toilet gradually from the early weeks and months of life, and in some cases from the first days. Parents would hold their infants over a potty when they were most likely to want to wee or poo. This included after their feeds, food or drinks and when they woke up from sleep.

What skills does my child need to be able to potty or toilet train?

The skills needed for potty/toilet training include:

- Knowing the right place to wee and poo.
- Understanding the feeling when it is time to wee or poo.
- Being able to tell you that they need the potty or toilet.
- Being able to wait until they get to the potty or toilet.
- Getting to the potty or toilet.
- Being able to get undressed before using the potty or toilet and then dressed again afterwards.
- Being able to sit in the right place for long enough to wee and poo.
- Being able to wipe themselves clean.
- Washing and drying their hands.
- Getting back to what they were doing before the potty or toilet visit.

**You do not need to wait for your child to be able to do all or any of these things before you start to teach them the skills that they need for potty and toilet training.**

Children with typical development, as well as those with additional needs, sensory issues, or disabilities, should be able to successfully start to learn the skills needed to use the potty or toilet from a few weeks or months old, although it is never too late to start. Children who do have additional needs or disabilities may take longer than other children to learn the skills and they may continue to need more help from you or whoever is looking after them, but starting to learn the skills should not be delayed just because of the additional needs or disability.

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My child is struggling with toilet training. Does this mean that they are not ready yet?

Up to a third of all children may have a problem with their bladder or bowel. Most of these are treatable. Therefore, if you and your child are struggling with potty or toilet training you should be offered assessment to make sure that there is no underlying problem such as constipation.

Waiting until your child is a bit older is not helpful for most children.

## My child has additional needs or disabilities

If your child has additional needs or disabilities their bladder and bowel should be the same as that of other children their age. As potty or toilet training can help the bladder mature, there is no reason why it should be delayed simply because of the additional need or disability. However, your child may need an occupational therapy assessment to see if they would benefit from any adaptations or from specialist equipment to help them feel safe and secure while using the potty or toilet. The occupational therapists can liaise with the school team to ensure these adaptations transition with them to the school setting.

Different children take different amounts of time to be successful learning new skills. Most children can learn at least some of the skills needed for potty or toilet training. However, some children will always need extra help or support to use the potty or toilet. They may need reminding to go, especially if they are busy, distracted or somewhere new. They may need help to get to the toilet, or managing their clothes, or with wiping. However, it is important that your child is supported to become as independent as they can with toileting.

Schools are obliged to make the reasonable adjustments needed to meet your child's needs whilst they are in their care and a toileting support plan can be agreed with school before they start. This can be supported by your local health professional such as your GP, School Nurse, or Health Visitor. Tailoring support and different options are available and contacting your school early in the term before they are due to start can help to reassure you.

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Children with disabilities or additional needs are more likely than their peers to have an underlying problem with their bladder or bowel. Therefore, if they are struggling to toilet train, they should be offered an assessment of their bladder and bowel health and appropriate support. It should not be assumed that any ongoing wetting and soiling is due to their disability, additional need, or a behaviour problem.

Children who are struggling with potty training may have sensory differences that are impacting, or it may be that they need a different approach. Ask your healthcare professional for support or for a referral to a local children's bladder and bowel service if there is one in your area.

## Other problems with potty or toilet training

It is important to remember that to become potty or toilet trained children need to learn a set of skills. Every child is different. Your child may need more support with some skills and less with others. The most important thing for success is that you are calm, consistent and continue to work with your child on learning the skills. If it does not seem to be working, or there are problems, it does not mean that your child cannot potty or toilet train, or that they are not ready to learn. It may simply mean that they need a different approach. If this is the case, then do speak to your healthcare professional for more advice.

## Further information

You may also want to check out our troubleshooting potty or toilet training guide [here](#).

There is also more advice available in the other Bladder & Bowel UK toilet training guides available in our [information library](#).

You may also contact the Bladder & Bowel UK helpline via the webform at [www.bbuk.org.uk/enquiries](http://www.bbuk.org.uk/enquiries) or by telephoning **0161 214 4591**.

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.