

# Introducing potty learning with your baby in the first weeks and months of life



## Background

Most children can learn the skills they need to be clean and dry by the time they are 18 months old, although they will still need help with aspects of toileting, such as getting to the potty or toilet and wiping.

Healthy babies, born at term, know when they want to wee and poo. They may pull a face, wriggle, make a sound, or move into a certain position, when they are about to wee or poo. Babies are most likely to poo 10 – 30 minutes after a feed. They are most likely to wee when they are awake or just waking from sleep.

Families can use this information to catch their infants wee or poo on a potty. This is often called infant-led pottying or elimination communication.

## Advantages to infant-led pottying

Children who are supported with infant-led pottying have less unexplained crying than others.

Infant-led pottying helps the infant or child to relax their pelvic floor when emptying their bladder and bowels. This may lead to more complete emptying, which can help prevent constipation. (There is more information about [constipation in infants and toddlers](#) on the [Bladder & Bowel UK](#) website).

Early introduction to the potty may help the bladder mature and is associated with fewer bladder problems later in childhood. This method of early toilet teaching means there are fewer sudden changes at toilet training. Many children find these changes difficult.

Infant-led pottying can help families spend less on nappies. It is better for the environment if fewer nappies are used.

## My child has additional needs, learning difficulties or disabilities is this suitable for them?

Children with additional needs may find the changes associated with toilet training very difficult. They are being expected to change the routine of using a nappy, which has been their only experience of toileting since birth. Making the change can become more difficult as the child gets older, because they have been using nappies for a longer time.

Most children with additional needs respond well to infant-led pottying. However, how you approach this may need to be adapted for your child. Ask your healthcare professional for support and advice.

## Does infant-led pottying mean no nappies?

Some families choose to try to manage without nappies, some use washables, some use disposables. Some use a mix of both. Whether and how much you use a nappy for your baby or toddler is down to individual choice.

Infant-led pottying is about learning to notice your baby or toddler's cues and then trying to catch a wee or poo in a potty or other container. You can do this all the time, some of the time, or just at times when you know your baby or child is more likely to want to wee or poo, such as after waking and after feeds or when you see one of their cues.

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By introducing pottying early, you are helping your baby or toddler notice when they want to wee or poo. You are also helping them to understand there is a place to do this and how to sit on the potty or toilet.

## **When should I start?**

You can start at any time in the early weeks or months of life.

This was the how parents taught babies and children to toilet before there were disposable nappies, with most starting soon after birth or when their babies could sit without support (at about six to nine months old).

If your child is older than about 18 months, introducing potty sits will still be helpful. Learning to sit on the potty or toilet is one of the most important skills your child will need for toilet learning.

There is more information on toilet learning for children of any age in [The Bladder & Bowel UK guide to potty and toilet training](#)

## **How do I approach infant-led pottying?**

**Watch your baby or toddler for cues:** that they may be about to wee or poo. This may be as soon as they wake from sleep or after a feed or drink, or if you think they may need a poo. Many babies wee when they wake up and poo 15 – 30 minutes after a feed.

**Decide when you are going to start and what equipment you need:** You may decide to use a container, a potty, or a toilet reducer seat, depending on your child's age, how big or small they are and whether they can sit without any support (about six to nine months old for most children).

**Practice how you are going to hold them over or on the container or potty:** if they can't sit on their own. A squat position (knees bent and higher than hips with top of the legs or buttocks well supported) is best. This position helps the pelvic floor relax.

You may choose to hold them with their back against your tummy and your hands on the underneath of their thighs. In this position you can bend their knees up towards their chest and hold their legs apart with their bottom over the potty or container. You may want to hold a smaller baby on your lap with their legs higher than their hips and a potty or container between your legs. Practice to find the position that works for you and them.

Older children who can sit may go straight to a potty.

If your child has additional needs their occupational therapist may be able to recommend or provide a potty or toilet chair.

**Think about what clothes you are going to use:** You need to be able to get to your baby or toddler's bottom quickly and easily when you are going to try and catch a wee or poo.

**Decide when you are going to start** trying to catch some of their wees and poos and how often you are going to try. Be realistic about what you can manage. Don't expect to catch a wee or poo every time you try.

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Every time that you try to catch a wee or poo, you help your little one learn the importance of the messages their brain is already getting about wee and poo. This will help them learn the skills they need to become more independent with toileting as they get older.

**Make a sound** when you think your baby or toddler needs a wee or poo, or when you want them to wee or poo. You may have a different sound for each such as 'psss' for wee and 'poo-poo' for poo. They will then start to associate the sound with weeing or pooing.

**Put it all together** by starting to try and catch some wees and poos. You can also try some nappy-free time.

**Stay calm, be consistent and positive:** your baby or toddler is learning about their wee and poo and you are learning about them. The aim is that not only do you start to catch some of their wee and poo, but that they learn that pottying is part of life and fun.

**What next?** As your child grows and learns to crawl and walk, have the potty near them so that they can get to it easily.

If you have been using sounds for wee and poo encourage your child to make those sounds when they want to go, so that you can help them get to the potty at the right time.

Make potty time fun. Read with them while they sit, have them sit on the potty when you are using the toilet, sing together, or let them have a little toy while sitting.

Think about starting to use the toilet as they get bigger. For more information about this see the [Bladder & Bowel UK guide on moving from potty to toilet](#).

## What if I don't think I can manage this?

There are advantages to trying infant-led pottying. If you are not able to manage the suggestions here all of the time, consider using nappies some of the time, but try to practice some of the suggestions just occasionally, maybe on some evenings or at weekends

## Further information

Find more information about bladder and bowel health and about supporting your child to learn the skills for toileting in our [information library](#). You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](#) (0161 214 4591).

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

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