



Family Nursing  
& Home Care

## Building Blocks to Toilet Training

*Based on ERIC Charity (Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence)*

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)

Is your child reliably clean and dry in the daytime?

If the answer to that is no, don't panic!

Maybe you've been trying but things haven't been going well.....if that's the case read on- there can be reasons why children struggle to get their wees and poos in the toilet.

***Before starting toilet training, or if your child is struggling to be reliably clean and dry during the day there are some basic skills you can help your child acquire. These are the building blocks to ensure successful toilet training.***

### **1. Make sure your child is not constipated.**

Your child should pass soft stools at least four times a week. If they are passing fewer poos than this, and/or harder poos, they might be constipated.....leaking runny poos can also mean constipation. What does healthy poo look like.....refer to ERIC leaflet '*Thinking about wee and poo now you're on your way to school!*'

All children need help to make sure they have a healthy bladder and healthy bowels, even one episode of constipation or difficulty passing a poo is enough to put a child off going for a poo again.

Check your child has plenty of fluids-a minimum of 6-8 drinks (water is best) every day. Refer to ERIC leaflet '*Thinking about wee and poo now you're on your way to school!*' to see what your child should drink. The bladder must fill and empty 3 times a day; like any muscle in our body, we need to train it!

\*If you suspect your child is constipated see your G.P. and get started straight away on making things more comfortable for them. If your child is on medication such as Movicol, ensure it is correctly mixed as per the instructions before adding to food or drink. It can take 3 months of soft poo to allow the bowels to return to normal.

### **2. Clothes and Pants.**

Choose clothes that are easy to pull up and down- avoid fiddly zips and buttons- for nursery/school jogging bottoms or trousers/shorts with elastic waist are easiest. Making these changes will be a good start for them working towards being more independent-practice getting dressed and undressed.

### 3. **The toilet.**

Choose a suitable child's toilet seat, along with a step or box that is high enough to provide firm support under the child's feet while they sit on the toilet. The toilet seat should fit securely to allow them to feel safe and relaxed whilst sat on the toilet. At this stage boys need to learn to wee sitting down, not standing, as they must feel happy to sit when it comes time to poo on the toilet.

Most Important! When there is a need to change a pull-up/pad/pants, do it in the bathroom or toilet environment. Some children find this a difficult transition to make, especially if changing has historically been done in a room with a TV, in the bedroom or lounge, with distractions around. The key is to be firm but calm, and don't give in.

## **Getting Going!**

**This can be broken down into several steps;**

### 4. **Keep a bag of toys ready to play with while they're on the toilet.**

This will ensure they remain happy to sit on the toilet for 2 or 3 minutes. Make it a special time for you both-the whole experience will be much more positive if you invest time to learn together.

The "toilet toys" will help your little one feel positive about going to the bathroom and will give them something to look at whilst there. Keep those toys in the bathroom only to be used whilst in there, not taken out!

### 5. **Always use the same words "Toilet Time"** when asking them to come to the toilet area to change their pad.

"Toilet Time" is a good phrase to use, as then once they are wearing pants you can continue to use the same command. Encourage all people who spend time with the child to use the same words. Do not ask your child if they would like to come to the toilet, they need to understand that it is you telling them, it's not a choice at this stage. Simply say "its toilet time" every couple of hours and build that into your daily routine (see step 7). Your child will then already be able to follow the instruction "Toilet Time" and understand what it means and what is expected of them, which will make it much easier for them to achieve staying dry, when the time comes.

Say the command in a confident happy voice so that they know this is a good, positive activity to do. You can give the child a minute to think about what you have asked and then if necessary repeat the same command again, taking their hand to encourage them to come with you.

### 6. **Reassure the child about the activity they will be coming back to** once Toilet Time is finished using few words. e.g. "Now it's Toilet Time, next we can play with cars/TV/go in the car/see grandma", etc. This will offer a natural reward for following your command and completing the routine. (Now and Next)

Positively reinforce this during the toilet visit. For example; "Well done coming to the toilet, next you can play with your cars, good boy."

7. **Make changing/checking pad, in the toilet part of your daily routine**, and where possible sticking to roughly the same times each day, (instead of only visiting the bathroom, just when the pad needs changing) Here are some examples:

- When they get up
- After breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Before bath time

\*At snack/lunch/dinner times, strongly encourage them to finish their drink, within a reasonable time scale (approx. 20 mins) and before moving on to the next activity. This should be ideally 150-200ml in one session. As well as having any other drinks they ask for in between these times.

8. **Change standing up** (unless badly soiled- then at home you could use a changing mat on the bathroom floor, but then continue with the routine standing – always put the poo in the toilet from the pad/pull up.)

Pull ups help with this goal, as it can be difficult to do a (nappy) pad standing up. Velcro sided pull-ups are also good as it means that that you do not need to take clothes/shoes off to change. They can use the bath or sink to hold onto for support. Praise, encourage and support them during each completed part of the toilet routine, e.g. “what a big girl, well done!” This is great to boost their self-esteem and make them feel good about growing up.

9. **Be consistent** and always follow the same routine when visiting the toilet and ensure all those that care for your child do the same. The routine could be:

- **Say “It’s Toilet Time”** and go to the bathroom
- **Stand and pull down clothes**, but leave them around their ankles. Encourage children to do this for themselves, but at this stage you can help or do it for them.
- **Sit on toilet**, with help if needed. (Use a step) I would not expect them to wee or poo at this stage, but if by chance they do, huge celebration!!! Whilst they are sat on the toilet they can blow some bubbles, this is fun and also encourages them to wee. You can even get an app on your phone to blow up a balloon!
- **Take off old (nappy)pad/pull up/pants, and put on new one**, whilst they are sitting on the toilet. (Pull-ups with Velcro sides are really useful)
- **Stand up and wipe** with toilet paper and/or flushable wipes, and put into the toilet, along with the poo.
- **Pull up clothes**
- **Flush the toilet**, you can help them do this. This will make sure they are not frightened of the flush as well as being fun and rewarding for them.
- **Wash hands**, using the step, then dry them. Again a natural reward for following the routine.

10. **Give lots of praise and be patient.**

Toilet training is a skill which may take some time to learn, so don’t be surprised if there are lots of accidents to start with. Give praise for each little step, like sitting on the toilet, washing hands and getting dressed. Rewards are a good incentive – make them small and instant, like a sticker. Reward achievable tasks like sitting on the toilet rather than staying clean and dry all day, which your child might not manage at first.

When your child is reliably dry during the day you can start thinking about night times.