

Toileting

When should I start toilet training my child?

Whilst there is no universal "right" age to start toilet training your child, typically children start to show signs of readiness between 18 months and 3 years. For children with disability or developmental delay, readiness may appear when they are a little bit older. However, the signs that a child is developmentally ready to start toilet training are generally the same for most children.

What to look out for:

- they have a dry nappy for 2+ hours, indicating they are starting to develop bladder control;
- they are starting to show interest in the toilet;
- they dislike having a wet or soiled nappy and may show this by trying to take their nappy off when it is dirty or;
- they can express they need to go to the toilet, this could be verbally, using gestures or pictures, depending on their preferred communication style.



Things to consider before starting toilet training

Going to the toilet requires a number of skills, including gross and fine motor skills, bilateral coordination and regulation skills. All children are different and toilet training can take days, weeks or months, so don't be discouraged if things don't happen quickly. Be patient and keep encouraging your child.

Some things to consider:

- Will your child use a potty or the toilet? You may like to use both, or this may be decided given the age and or/size of the child, or personal preference. If the child is quite small, a potty may be a better option for them.
- If you decide to use the toilet, can they reach the toilet or do they require a small step or footstool for getting onto the toilet or resting their feet whilst sitting? And once sitting on the toilet, can they sit comfortably or do they fall in? If they do, you may need to get a smaller seat that inserts securely inside the bigger toilet seat.
- Consider your child's interoceptive awareness (their ability to perceive and understand their internal bodily sensations such as hunger, thirst or needing to go to the toilet.)
- Some children with disability, developmental delay or additional support needs may require additional support and strategies adjusted to suit their needs. Video modelling, visual supports and social stories can support your child's toileting journey.

Top tips for toileting

- **Choose a calm, stable time in your child's life** – try to avoid starting toilet training if there are any big changes happening, like moving house, expecting a new sibling or starting day care.
- **Make going to the toilet part of your child's daily routine** – start with regular toilet times (every 1-2 hours) It's a good idea to take them first thing in the morning, after meals (generally 20-30 minutes is a good amount of time to wait after eating or drinking), after naps and before bed.
- **Keep it positive** – celebrate effort, not just success. Use praise and encouragement, high-fives, stickers or small rewards for trying e.g. "Great job sitting on the toilet". Avoid pressure or punishment – accidents are part of the process!
- **Dress for success** – start using underwear or training pants so that your child starts to become aware of the feeling of 'wet'. You can also try dressing your child in underwear or training pants under their nappy to avoid accidents on the floor.
Fun tip – let your child choose some fun underwear with their favourite picture or character on them! It can also help to choose clothes that are easy to pull up and down.
- **Make it fun** – use songs, books or visuals to make toileting fun and engaging for your child. If your child has not done a poo or wee after 3-5 minutes sitting on the potty or toilet, praise them for trying and let them get off. Sitting for too long can feel like a punishment and become a negative toileting experience and can reduce the willingness to try again.
- **Hygiene** – help your child learn how to wipe, flush and wash their hands every time they use the toilet.
- **Be consistent** – stick with your routine as much as possible – even when you're out and about. Bring a travel potty or familiarise yourself with where the bathrooms are.
- **Stay calm with setbacks** – accidents happen. Respond with reassurance, not frustration. A calm approach helps your child feel safe and supported.
Additional tip – emptying poo from your child's nappy into toilet helps them understand that poo goes in the toilet.
- **Daytime toilet training usually comes first** – use training pants at night if needed, and be patient—most children take longer to stay dry overnight.

