




Excerpt from

PROMOTING A HEALTHY BLADDER AND BOWEL

Toilet training children
with additional needs



Reviewed 2024

Created by



Contribution from

Paediatric Continence
Scotland



Supported by



Toilet training children with additional needs

Having their children toilet trained is a milestone all parents strive for. For some parents of children with disabilities, this milestone may seem unobtainable. However clinical experience has taught us that most children can become toilet trained at the same age as their typically developing peers, so skills development for toilet training should not be delayed.

For children with additional support needs (ASN), the lack of interest from the child often results in the initiation of toilet training being delayed until the child 'appears ready'. Unfortunately for some children, waiting until they appear ready and interested in toilet training means waiting a very long time!

Don't wait for them to give some sign of readiness – some children never will – but they should have a typically developing bladder and bowel, so should be able to learn the skills if taught in the right way. It may be tempting to wait until they are older, due to all the other challenges, but this risks possible underlying problems being missed. Also, the longer they continue to wear their 'portable toilet' (that's what a pad/nappy is after all) the harder it will be to introduce a new place to wee and poo, so start to work on the skills they need early. The best approach is to introduce the potty from a few weeks old, if possible. Ask your healthcare professional for advice and support.

Clinical experience has shown that children with learning difficulties or processing differences may need additional support or take longer to learn the skills. They may also need different approaches, such as using picture cue cards or games to help communication and understanding. Your healthcare professional should be able to make some suggestions.

So rather than waiting for the child with learning difficulties or processing difficulties to be socially aware and motivated before toilet training commences, the skills needed for toilet training should be worked on from as early as possible. The social awareness and motivational aspects can be added in as a behaviour programme, involving lots of positive reinforcement.

Toilet training is about learning and using a set of skills that can be broken into a number of steps and addressing each step, one at a time, makes the whole process a lot easier and more manageable for the family.

A toilet skill development programme supports the child to learn the skills they need in a way that works for them. It helps them to progress through the steps until they are passing about half of their wees on the toilet or potty. The daytime nappy can then be removed, but the other routines for toileting should remain the same while the child continues to learn where wee and poo should go.





Approved: PHIG 2024

Created by



Contribution from

Paediatric Continence
Scotland



Supported by

