

Excerpt from

PROMOTING A HEALTHY BLADDER AND BOWEL

One step at a time



Reviewed 2024

Created by



Contribution from

Paediatric Continence
Scotland



Supported by



One step at a time

“One step at a time” is an approach that can be used for any child. It has been used successfully with children who have a range of learning and processing difficulties. Each step brings the child closer to the goal of being toilet trained.

Step 1: Setting the scene

- Introducing and encouraging changes to the routine of nappy changing, which enables the child to learn new skills and start on the path towards toilet training.
- It involves establishing healthy habits with eating and drinking and sitting on the potty or toilet at regular intervals during the day.
- Changing the child in the bathroom enables them to be more aware of the connection between wees, poos and the toilet.
- Learning about wet and dry is also introduced at this stage.
- For those children who are able to stand unsupported it is suggested that the child is changed standing up, as that way they can get more involved with the process, such as pulling pants up and down and learning about wiping their own bottom.
- Start by just getting used to sitting on the toilet at regular intervals. If your child is reluctant to sit, you could start with trousers up so they get familiar with the toilet. Help your child to feel relaxed and happy on the toilet before proceeding, gradually building up the time they will sit on the toilet.



Step 2:

Developing the skills needed

- At the end of this step the child should be happily sitting on the toilet for up to two minutes or so (long enough to do a wee/poo), although at this stage the child is not really expected to use the toilet. That will hopefully be achieved in step 4.
- Flushing, washing and drying hands.
- How to use rewards and praise appropriately is an important factor.
- Symbols/pictures for sitting on the toilet and pulling pants up and down, flushing, washing and drying hands can be shown to the child at this stage (adapt from 'Girl and Boy Toilet Social Story' Appendix 1).
- The 'reward' can gradually be faded out over a period of time, while still continuing with the verbal praise.
- Toilet toys such as bubbles or squeezey / tactile toys can help encourage the child to sit and stay on the toilet.
- You could try looking at some fun books about using a potty/toilet together. Examples include: 'Pip and Posy the little puddle' by Axel Sheffler, 'Princess Polly's Potty' or 'Pirate Pete's Potty' by Andrea Pinnington.
- You could also play games, such as the Toilet Training Sequencing Game (www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/down-syndrome-uk-toilet-training-sequencing-game-girls-t-par-1670936479)
- Rewards help engage the child in developing new skills, but it is important that any rewards that are used are kept solely for achieving the target behaviour. If the child gets the 'reward' at any other time it becomes meaningless. It is important that the reward is given immediately, with specific praise e.g. 'Good boy for sitting on the toilet!', so the child knows exactly what the reward is for.



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Step 3:

Raising awareness

- Identifying the child's habits - such as how long they can stay dry for and if there is a regular time when they have their bowels opened.
- Putting folded pieces of kitchen roll in the nappy – starting with the first nappy change of the day and checking and keeping a note hourly, will help give an idea of how often the child wees and how long they can stay dry for. This needs to be done for at least three full days (they do not need to be consecutive days). The child can be involved in the checking process.
- The process of checking your child's nappy will tell you how long they can stay dry for. Take your child to the potty or toilet at the intervals that they can stay dry for, but do not take them more than once an hour. Timing for taking your child should start when they last weed, rather than the time they last sat on the potty or toilet. If your child is wet every time they are checked, still sit them on the potty every hour and if the frequent wetting continues when they are used to this, talk to their healthcare professional.
- Problems with the bladder or bowels should be assessed and treated for a child with additional needs in the same way as if the child did not have additional needs.



Step 4:

Using the toilet for wee and poo

- At this stage the child should be co-operating when taken to the toilet and sit happily.
- The skills now introduced and developed include using the toilet to wee and poo, wiping their bottom and using unfamiliar toilets.
- Simple advice, regarding using the 'gastro colic reflex' (this is the movement along the bowel which normally happens after eating) to help facilitate bowel evacuations on the potty/toilet may be helpful in deciding the best times to sit the child on the potty/toilet, as will using the fact that most children void (wee) upon waking after sleep and within an hour of drinking a significant amount.
- Try not to delay starting work on the skill for toilet training. It should be introduced in a matter of fact way, as a normal every day activity.
- Having an open-door policy for the bathroom, will allow the child to see other members of the family using the toilet and it will be seen as something everyone does.
- Regularly show your child symbols about going to the toilet and/or a story about going to the toilet. These can be shown when in the bathroom but also at other times of the day when your child is feeling relaxed. For symbols, look at Toileting Routine Symbols in the appendix and for stories, See 'Girl and Boy Toilet Social Story' or 'My Story about going to the toilet' which gives a bit more detail, also in the appendix.

Step 5:

Night time control

- Some children will spontaneously become dry at night within a few months of being dry during the day, if not sooner. However a number of children may continue to be wet at night for some considerable time
- If children are not dry at night by their fifth birthday ask their healthcare professional for support. Bedwetting after age 5 is a medical condition called nocturnal enuresis, which is a treatable condition. Nappies may be used until treatment is offered, although they should have a trial of up to two weeks without them.





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