

## Step 4: Using the toilet

At this stage, the necessary skills will have been practiced for the child to cooperate when taken to the toilet, happily sit on and attempt to pull their pants up and down.

- Continue to praise enthusiastically if the child voids urine or has their bowels open in the toilet. This helps to reinforce the behaviour.
- Usually most children will pass urine(wee) upon:
  - o Waking after sleep or a nap.
  - o Within an hour of drinking a significant amount.
  - o Have their bowels open usually 20-30 minutes after a meal.
  - o Using the record you have already kept helps to also guide you and establish a routine.
  - o Remember to let the other services your child maybe attending (school etc) know that you have started to toilet train your child so they can continue the routine.
- After a few days of 'intensive training' you will probably have established a routine where you take your child to the toilet after having drinks and food. This means your child will be sitting on the toilet 5-7 times per day.
- Keep the focus on your child using the toilet in a relaxed fun setting, rather than focusing on the stories /songs.
- You will have to prompt your child in the beginning, however as your child becomes more reliable you reduce the prompting and encourage them to ask or tell you when they need to go.
- When using unfamiliar or public toilets:
  - o Try to find a toilet that is not too busy or noisy to start with.
  - o Point out the similarities of the toilet space to your child e.g. the toilet paper, flushing handle etc.

- Wiping the bottom is an important but sometimes complex skill for your child to learn. It involves balance, hand skills and remembering to do it in the right order.
  - o Use the same instructions each time for example:
    - pull down paper
    - tear paper
    - roll/fold paper into hand
    - reach back to bottom
    - wipe once from front to back
    - check if paper is clean
    - drop into toilet
    - repeat until paper is clean
  - o You may need to put your hand over theirs at first to help them learn.
  - o Allow plenty of time for your child to learn and practice this skill
- Accidents are part of the toilet training process. Be careful that you give your child the right response so they can learn.
  - o Stay calm.
  - o Getting angry will not teach the child what to do to stop accidents happening, only that you get angry if they have an accident.
  - o Having cheery conversations or cuddling the child following an accident may encourage them to repeat the accident to get attention.
  - o Only reward the behaviour you want - like telling you they want to go to the toilet, sitting on the toilet etc.
  - o Clean the child in the bathroom with minimum of fuss.
  - o It is useful to have an 'accident pack' containing new underwear, wipes, rubbish bag, to hand.

## Stage 5: Night time control



Once the child is dry during the day some children will quickly become dry at night within a few months, if not sooner.

It can take up to six months for a child to be reliably dry during the day, and some children with additional needs can take longer. If your child persists with bedwetting for some considerable time you can seek help from School Nurse, GP or Continence Service.

Success with toilet training will depend on your child's abilities and will vary from child to child. It can be a long journey, can be time consuming, and labour intensive, repetitive and sometimes even frustrating. However remember each step is progress and you are helping your child to become more independent. Even if you have set backs along the way, stick with it because eventually you both will succeed.

**For further help and information contact**

Your GP, Public Health Nurse, Continence Advisory Service.

[www.hse.ie/continencecare](http://www.hse.ie/continencecare)

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Adapted from 'One Step at a Time'  
Victoria Continence Resource Centre, Australia.  
Information Sheet on Toilet training children with special needs. Promocon UK

Keen Print 090 6625787



# Toilet Training a Child with Additional Needs

**This leaflet is best used  
on the advice of  
a Healthcare Professional.**

Becoming dry and clean is an important developmental milestone for all children. Many children with additional needs manage to get toilet trained, it may just take longer to achieve.

Having additional needs does not mean that your child cannot develop all or some of the skills of being toilet trained.

By introducing your child to a toilet training programme that is tailored to your child's level of ability and understanding, helps to have a positive impact on their self esteem, independence and quality of life.

Becoming toilet trained involves the interaction of two main processes –

- The bladder and bowel becomes mature at 2-3years.
- Understanding and social awareness.

For children with additional needs it is often the lack of understanding and social awareness that results in delayed toilet training rather than a problem within the maturation of the bladder or bowel.

Toilet training is best started when the child is not experiencing any other change, such as a new sibling or moving house and introduced in a matter of fact way as a normal every day activity

Toilet training is a skill that can be broken into a number of steps and by addressing each step at a time, makes the whole process a lot easier and more manageable for the child and family.

## Step 1: Setting the scene

This step is mainly about 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:

- Eating healthy food.  
Having a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, whole grain foods and cereals helps to prevent constipation as it can make toilet training difficult.
- Drinking well  
Encourage your child to have 6-8 water based drinks throughout the day. This helps the bladder to fill and empty regularly. Fluid also helps to reduce the risks of constipation
- Deciding what words you are going to use (e.g. wee, poo). It is important that every one involved in the toilet training uses the same words so the child doesn't get confused.
- Sitting on the potty or toilet at regular intervals during the day to get used to it.
- Changing the child in the bathroom helps them to be more aware of the connection between wees and poos and the toilet.
- Your child can start to learn about being wet and dry.
- If your child is able to stand unsupported, changing your child standing up helps them to get more involved with the process, such as pulling pants up and down and learning about wiping their own bottom.

## Step 2: Developing the skills needed

This step focuses on the skills required and performed in the correct sequence to use the toilet including:

- o Recognising the need to go to the toilet
- o Holding on until they get there
- o Walking into the bathroom
- o Pulling down their clothing and pants
- o Sitting on the toilet
- o Eliminating into the toilet
- o Using toilet paper correctly
- o Pulling up their clothes and pants
- o Flushing the toilet
- o Washing their hands
- o Drying their hands

You may need some equipment to help your child sit on the toilet (e.g. potty seat, foot stool) and feel safe.

Depending on your child's communication skills you may need to learn the sign for toilet or get a picture of the toilet

Use of praise and rewards:

- Praise and rewards when used appropriately is an important factor.
- Praise should be specific and given enthusiastically e.g. 'Good boy/girl for doing a wee in the toilet!'
- Rewards help with engaging the child in developing new skills, but it is important that any rewards that are used are kept solely for achieving a specific behaviour skill.
- It is important that the reward is given immediately with specific praise, so the child knows exactly what the reward is for.
- Giving the 'reward' at any other time loses its power to encourage the behaviour skill you are working on. It may also confuse your child as they may have forgotten what the reward is for.

- The 'reward' can gradually be faded out over a period of time while still continuing with the verbal praise.
- Rewards do not need to be costly for example a reward may be reading a story, playing a game, singing a song.

Toilet toys can help encourage the child to sit and stay on the toilet for example bubbles or squeeze / tactile toys

At the end of this step the child should be happily sitting on the toilet for up to 2 minutes or so (long enough to do a wee/poo). However it is important to remember at this stage the child may or may not use the toilet. This may not happen until later.

## Step 3: Finding the toilet pattern and raising awareness,

This step involves 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 open.

- First check the nappy when your child wakes up in the morning and continue to check the nappy every hour through out the day, recording what you find. This helps to give an idea of when the child has their bowels open or how often the child is wet and how long they can stay dry for.
- Whenever you find that the nappy is wet or soiled change it. This way you'll be certain if there has been any activity in the following hour and your child will get more used to being dry.
- Encourage your child to tell you if they are wet
- This record of your child's pattern can be used to guide you on how often you need to take your child to the toilet.
- Once you have identified that the child is able to stay dry for increasing periods the child could come out of disposable nappies into normal washable underwear.