

#Pants4School Toilet skill development programme



Introduction

The Pants4School Toilet Skill Development Programme has been developed over many years and aims to enable children with Down Syndrome to develop the skills, awareness and understanding needed to be toilet trained.

We recommend that you ideally start when your child is weaning (6-9 months old) but if your child is older don't worry, it's never too late to start.

For children who are over the age of 2 years old, steps 1 and 2 could be combined. It may also be appropriate to introduce elements of step 3 such as learning about pulling pants up and down, flushing the toilet and washing hands.

Regardless of how old your child is, communication is the key. We recommend you talk about, sign, and show an appropriate picture every time you change a nappy or sit your child on the potty or toilet. This sows the seeds for them learning to go to the toilet on their own (known as self-initiation) later on.

Make sure that everyone looking after your child knows what step you are working on and that they do the same as you are. Contact #Pants4School, Bladder & Bowel UK or your healthcare professional if you need help at any stage.

Step 1 - Getting started

- Try to establish healthy eating and drinking habits (this helps prevent constipation).
- Change your child in the bathroom area, if possible. This helps your child make the connection between wees, poos and the toilet.
- Get the equipment you need such as potty, or toilet seat reducer and step. (Your occupational therapist (OT) may be able to provide some equipment so do ask).

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- Start by sitting your child on the potty for a short time (one to two minutes) once or twice a day. This can be done even if they need you to support them to sit.
- Let your child see you tipping the poo from the nappy/potty down the toilet and flushing the toilet.
- Once your child is happy to sit on the potty or toilet move to step 2.

Step 2 – Introducing regular potty or toilet times

- When your child is sitting for a minute or so build up the length of time they can sit on the potty or toilet. Use distraction, bubbles, songs, books, squeezey or tactile toys etc. to make sure that time on the potty or toilet is fun.
- Then gradually increase the number of times they sit on the potty or toilet, until they are eventually sitting when they wake up, after all meals and drinks, before a bath and before bed.
- For children starting the potty training journey early, sitting on the potty/toilet will soon become part of everyday routine.
- For older children you may need to introduce a reward for sitting on the potty or toilet to encourage them to sit.
- Let them see family members use the toilet.
- Talk about wee and poo when changing their nappy, and the need to stop what you're doing and go to the toilet when you need to do a wee or poo.
- Start to introduce sitting on the toilet, as well as the potty, if not already doing so. Make sure you have a good toilet seat reducer and a step, so that their bottom is well supported and their feet are flat on a firm surface, with their knees higher than their hips.
- Give specific praise 'Good boy for sitting on the toilet', 'Good girl you did a wee/poo.'
- If you happen to catch a wee or a poo, give your child lots of praise. This may be sufficient to encourage younger children. For older children a reward may be necessary.
- Include role play with dolls and teddies going for a wee and poo and, having clean dry pants.
- Talk to your child, sign to them and show them a picture of the potty and encourage them to copy you with lots of praise for successful attempts. This is the first step in the child eventually learning to self-initiate, that is going to the toilet without you reminding or taking them.

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- At the end of this step, your child should be able to sit happily on the potty or toilet for at least a minute for each year of their age (long enough to do a wee or a poo).
- We're not really expecting your child to consistently use the potty/toilet yet (that will come later).

Step 3 - Timed toileting

- Identify your child's bladder and bowel habits – how long can they stay dry for? Is there a usual time when they open their bowels?
- Find out how often they wee and how long they can stay dry by doing a baseline assessment. This involves: –
- Put folded kitchen towel in their nappy
- Check their nappy every hour and make a note if wet/dry (change the kitchen towel if it is wet and change their nappy if it is full or dirty)
- Do this for 3 days (these do not have to be consecutive days)
- Once you have identified roughly how long your child can stay dry for, start timed toileting. Take them to the toilet at the time interval you've identified they can stay dry for (but do not take them more often than every 60 minutes) and keep a record of whether they are wet or dry when you take them so you can see when timings might need to be adjusted (the Potty Whiz app is good for this).
- The timings should always follow the last wee rather than the clock.
- If your child appears to be wet every time you check them, sit them on the potty or toilet every hour and then repeat the baseline assessment once timed toileting is established. If your child continues to appear to be constantly wet discuss this with your Health Care Professional and get it checked before moving on, particularly if your child is over the age of 5 or has a history of wee infections or other related issues. Constipation should also always be excluded as it is a common cause of children wetting frequently.
- Social Stories can help your child become more aware of what is expected of them. These can be personalised and show a favourite character using the potty or toilet as well as your child. The story can also include the reward you are using for success on the toilet/potty. Let's Talk Visuals on Facebook will make a social story or cue cards for you.
- If your child is able to help pull their pants/trousers up or down, wash/dry their hands and flush the toilet encourage them to do so.

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- Play wet and dry games; use toys, pants, flannels etc. 'Oh, look this is wet, can you feel it? And this is dry, can you feel that?'
- When you get around half of your child's wees and poos on the toilet/potty it's time to prepare to move to step 4 (removal of the day-time nappy).
- During this 'timed toileting' step some parents choose to use washable trainer pants in preparation for step 4 when ordinary undies are worn.

Step 4 - Going into pants

- Make sure everyone who looks after your child knows the plan for the nappy coming off.
- Be prepared, there may well be lots of accidents as your child starts to experience and learns to respond to the sensation of weeing. Have plenty of pants, changes of clothes, protective covers for sofas, car seats, pushchair etc. Puppy pads are often used by parents as they are cheap and easy to source.
- Take the nappy off during the day
- Keep taking your child to the toilet or potty at the same times as you were in step 3. As time goes on you will be able to increase the timings between toilet trips.
- It can take a lot longer for your child to be able to tell you they need to wee or poo (self-initiate), so don't expect that to happen right away. A toilet picture, constant use of the toilet sign and using the words toilet/potty, wee & poo will help.

Step 5 - Night time control

- Becoming dry at night is a process that develops with time. Unlike daytime dryness it cannot be taught.
- Some children will become dry at night on their own, within a few months of being dry during the day.
- Most children will be dry at night by the time they are 5 years old.
- If your child is still wet at night beyond their fifth birthday and has been dry in the day for at least 6 months, then this is known as enuresis or bedwetting.

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- Enuresis is a medical condition which can and should be treated. Assessment and treatments are available for all children, including children with Down syndrome. Please ask your healthcare professional for advice if your child is still wetting the bed if they are five years old or more and have been potty or toilet trained in the day for six months.

Further information

Find more information about child bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.
