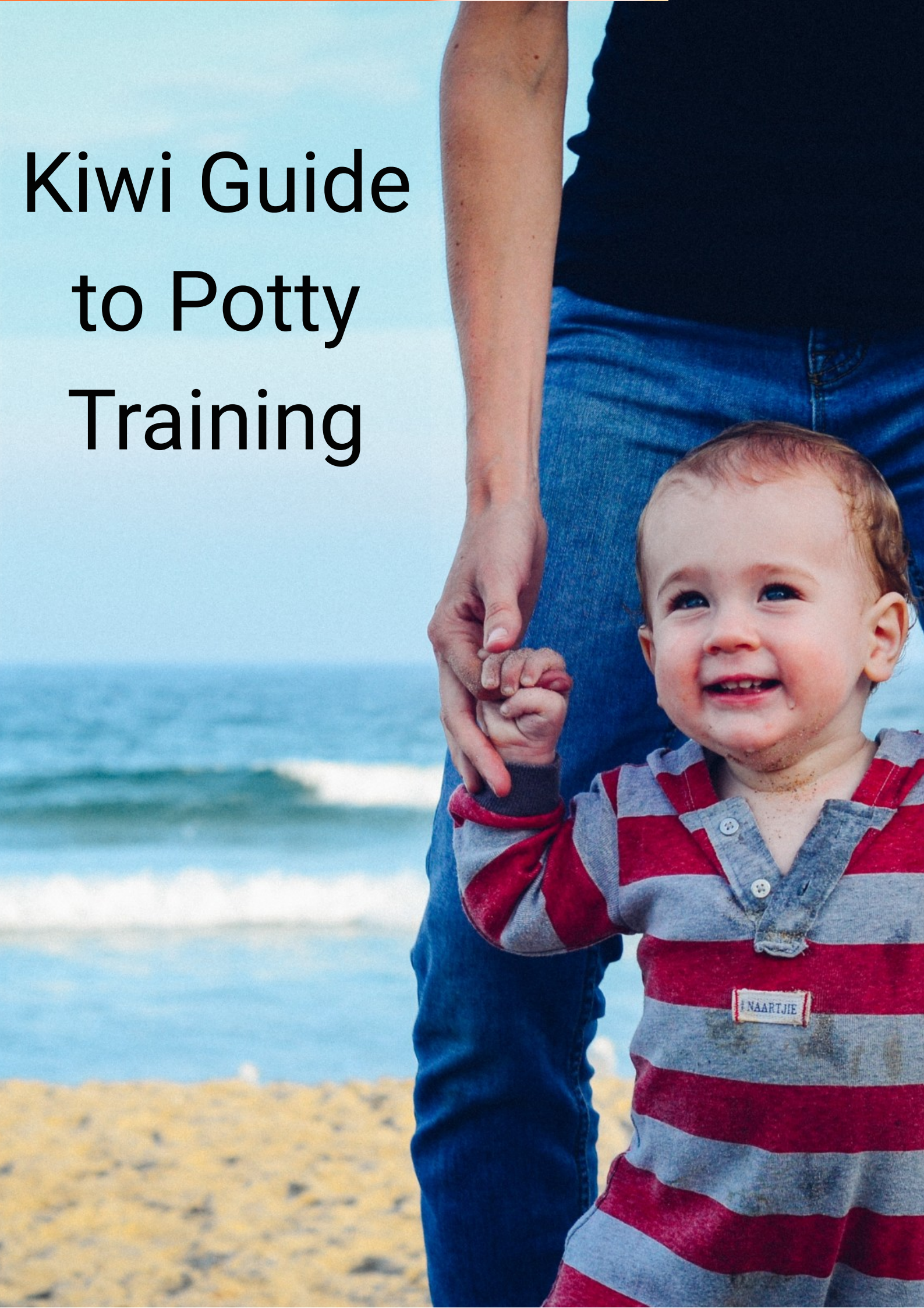


# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training



# Kiwi Family Media

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## Is your child ready?

This is perhaps the most hotly debated part of potty training. Over-anxious parents, who understandably don't want to deal with the hassle and expense of nappies anymore, often try to force their child into using the toilet before they're ready.

This is just counter-productive, you really want to wait until your child shows signs of readiness before you begin. If you don't, it could turn into a very long process, filled with frustration and headaches for both you and your child.

There's no magic age when potty training should begin, every child's different. Some are ready by 18 months to make a start, others won't be the least bit interested until after 3 years of age.

In general, most kids are ready around the age of 2 to 3, and girls tend to train before boys do (boys are often able to gain control of urine, but have difficulty with their bowel control).

Here's some common signs your child might be ready to use the potty:

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- Bowel movements (number twos!) occur at about the same time every day.
- They can stay dry for a few hours at a time, or they wake up dry after a sleep.
- Your child begins to talk about using the potty and wants to interact with the bathroom (flush the toilet, put toilet paper in the toilet, etc).
- They can tell you when they've soiled their nappy.
- They can understand the association between dry pants and using the potty.
- Your child understands toilet words, such as 'poop', 'pee', 'dry', 'wet', 'potty', etc.

Independence is also a really important part of being ready for the potty. If your child can understand simple commands like, 'let's go to the potty' then readiness is just around the corner. There's some other things to watch for as well:

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- Your child can pull their pants up and down.
- They begin to imitate other members of the family.
- They watch you on the toilet and ask questions about what you're doing.
- They're interested in body parts, yours and theirs, and they can point to their different body parts as you name them, eg nose, tummy, legs, etc.
- Your child wants to try out doing things by themselves.
- They enjoy washing their hands.
- Your child loves to please you, and to show you they can do things on their own.

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Toddlers are classically fussy little people. At a certain point, they'll refuse to do absolutely anything for you when asked! Once they've gotten over this stage though, and are starting to obey simple commands, potty training should definitely commence.

There's some steps you can take before the actual potty training process begins to prepare your child. Some of these steps, such as getting familiar with the bathroom, you can start quite early. Many children from the age of 12 months become interested in the bathroom, and this is a great time to introduce them to it properly.

## Helping your child get ready

You might like to call this part, 'setting the stage', and it should happen well before you begin toilet training. Few children train themselves. Like most new tasks they're learning, they need to know what's expected of them. This is where your help and guidance comes in.

Children more familiar with bathroom procedures are more likely to train quickly, than kids who are less familiar. So how can you help?

First, take your child to the bathroom with you. It's especially helpful if fathers and brothers set the example for boys, and mothers and sisters set the example for girls. Brothers or sisters often love to act as role models too.

Some parents find this part uncomfortable, and that's OK. Take it slowly. Just know that the more you model good toilet behaviour to your child, the more comfortable they'll be on the loo when it's their turn.

Of course, there's always other children who would like to show off their potty skills to your child. If your child's in daycare, they can watch how their peers use the potty and will most likely imitate them. In fact, this can actually speed up the process significantly.

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Try to help your child recognise the sensations of 'being wet,' 'wetting now,' and 'about to be wet.' Encourage your child to talk about these sensations -- especially 'about to be...' sensations -- without pressing your child to be toilet trained.

Comment on signs you notice, such as your child pausing in play, or walking as if they're uncomfortable after going in their nappy. Use action statements such as, 'you are pooping now', rather than asking the general question, 'what are you doing?'

Let your child go naked in appropriate settings to help them to 'see' what they're doing, and to help make the mental connection between your words and what they refer to.

Changing a nappy in the bathroom also helps associate the process with the place. Children over the age of 2 should be off the changing table for exactly this reason.

There's debate about whether you should refer to the body parts, and their functions, using the proper terms. But really, you should just use the terms that come most naturally to you. Remember, the goal is to make toileting as natural a process as possible.

That said, you should definitely use specific terms. Something like, 'going to the bathroom' is way too vague. 'Let's go pee on the potty now', is much better.

Also, try not to use words that will make your child think of their bodily functions as being dirty or disgusting. Try to avoid saying things like 'dirty,' 'stinky,' 'yucky,' etc.

Help your child learn the meaning of the terms 'before' and 'after' by using them yourself in other contexts such as, "before I eat dinner, I must wash my hands."

Talk up the advantages of being potty trained: no more nappy rash, no more nappy changing, and the pleasure of being clean and dry. And you can discuss training as an important stage of growing up. If your child is ready to use the potty, they'll understand you.

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Let your child practice lowering and raising their nappy sometimes, or putting them on and taking them off. Pull-ups are great for teaching them this concept.

The whole idea is to begin a transition towards training, so you're not just jumping in cold.

Some more transition tricks include:

- Buy some 'special' underwear for your toddler, that they can only use once they've mastered the potty. You can make a real song and dance of this, even take your child shopping for them.
- Have a potty chair on hand, again you can take you child out to buy it, if they don't have one yet.

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- Let them sit on the potty with their clothes on, and play with it, even sit and watch TV if they want to. Take it to the bathroom when you go in, as a seat for them. If they ignore the potty completely, don't push them, just relax and follow their lead.
- Let your child flush the toilet for you, so they get used to the noise. Make it fun, you can even 'wave bye bye' to the pee!
- Talk to your child about what it feels like when you need to go to the loo. And how you need to hold your pee just long enough to walk to the toilet, and sit down, before you 'let go'.
- Do some role play with your child's favourite toy and a pretend 'toilet'. Take them through the whole routine of feeling the full belly, getting to the loo in time, washing the toy's hands afterwards. This can really help a child to understand what's happening.
- Make a big deal about throwing your child's nappies in the trash. Tell them they won't be needed, as soon as they can use the potty.

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You can start reading 'potty' books to your child or watching potty videos (Youtube is a great resource). In fact, books and videos can really make the whole potty process a lot easier!

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## Books can help

There are literally hundreds of children's books dedicated to the theme of potty training. You should be able to find some titles at your local library. Otherwise you can check out a great range of books, with reader reviews on our [website here](#).

Since we're talking about tools that will help you during potty training, choosing the right potty can be a pretty big ordeal too!

## Finding your child's throne

Most parents follow the process of starting with a potty, or potty chair. Once that's mastered moving on to an adapter seat that fits over the regular toilet. Before using the big toilet all the time.

This process definitely isn't written in stone. Some parents opt to go straight for an adapter seat. Many parents will find their child 'reverts' back to a potty at some point too!

There are lots of different potty seats and chairs on the market. Getting the right one can really make a difference for some children, so it pays to put some thought into it.

Potty seats or chairs are a great tool. They allow your child to place their feet squarely on the floor when bearing down to poo, and you don't have to lift your child up onto the toilet. Potty chairs often have arms, which helps support your child while they're sitting down.

Help your child to really take ownership of 'their' potty. As noted above, it's a great idea to take them shopping to buy their potty. You might want to let them pick one out (or perhaps choose from 1 or 2 you're actually going to buy!). And you might want to let them personalise their potty, with stickers or decals.

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If you do opt for a potty, it'll probably be a molded one-piece style chair that a child straddles, or a plastic molded stool-type chair. Some potty chairs even look like miniature toilets. Many potty chairs today convert to adult toilet seat adapters as well.

Before purchasing a potty chair, check to see how the pot is removed. If the pot is hard to get out or has to be tipped, don't buy it!

If you have a boy, you may want to consider a urine deflector. Look for a removable one that's made of flexible plastic. These often adapt to fix on a toilet seat adapter too. You could also opt for a 'urinal' type potty for boys. Some even have targets built into them to teach boys where to pee.

You should consider buying more than one potty, especially if you have more than one bathroom or a two-story house. The extra one can always be used for car travel or left at Grandma's.

Some potties available on the market now play music, or light up when peed in. These can make potty training fun, and making it fun can definitely help with potty training. Just be careful that all the bells and whistles don't detract from the actual training part.

Expect to spend anywhere from around \$10-\$20 for a basic white molded plastic potty, \$30-\$50 for a potty with branding or ones that play music, and up to \$100 or more for a high end one. Some are even made of wood, and look like a replica from the Victorian age!

Make a big deal about the fact your child has something of their own that they can use and should use! You may want to try putting the potty in a room where they play often – even in the kitchen where you can supervise.

Encourage use of the potty chair by putting a 'potty chart' up on the fridge. Explain to your child that each time they use the potty chair, they'll get a sticker. This makes a great incentive, and kids love earning 'rewards' (more on this later).

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Potty chairs aren't your only option during potty training. Toilet seat adapters come in a huge variety too. We've already mentioned that some potty chairs turn into adapters. This is a great way for your child to transition to the big toilet.

Some adapters have handles. This is a really good option because many children find it difficult to balance on the toilet without holding on. You can also purchase toilet seat adapters attached to small step ladders, so that your child can get themselves on and off the loo. Again, this could be a good option for teaching your child independence.

Even though a simple plastic adapter might be more than sufficient for your child, you may want to consider a stool. Stools allow your child to get on and off the loo by themselves. But they also give your child something to rest their feet on and push against while going.

Finally, if you choose not to invest in any other equipment, and go straight to the toilet, just know that it can be a little scary for some kids.

You'll need to hold your child securely on the seat's edge yourself. Some children find it easier to sit on the toilet seat backwards.

Although some children won't use a potty, and going straight to the toilet is the only option, we advise starting with a potty for most kids. You can check out a great range of potty types, with reader reviews, on our [website here](#).

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## The right time to start

Your child's readiness is the main consideration, but there's also some other suggestions you should think about for toilet training.

In general, you should undertake this huge learning task during a time when there's little conflict and not much activity (potty training around Christmas time wouldn't be a good idea!).

A long weekend without worrying about work, could be a great time to start. Some parents take time off work just to dedicate to potty training.

Make potty training a top priority on a consistent basis when you have the emotional and physical energy to do it. Even if your child shows signs of potty training readiness, you may not be ready for it as a parent.

Other less-than-ideal times to begin potty training are during stressful situations such as traveling, just after having another baby, or during other big changes for your child, such as starting on a bottle or changing from a crib to a bed.

It may be better to postpone toilet training until yours and your child's environment is stable and secure. That said, if your child is ready to potty train, leaving it 6 months until the time is right would be counter-productive too.

We should note here that potty training isn't an overnight experience. The process typically takes between 3 and 6 months (although it may take more or less time for some kids). It then may take an additional 6 months to 1 year to master staying dry at night.

Of course there are programs that can help to speed up the process. But you'll be working on potty training for some time, so make sure you have a clear run.

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Some children are ready to be trained early, and they'll let you know. For others though, some gentle coaxing and guiding on your part is all part of the process. Most children need to know what's expected of them, and love to learn grown-up behaviour. Just don't push too hard.

## Bladder control

If possible, plan to devote at least three days in a row to begin bladder training and give your child your complete concentration. During those days you must be able to drop everything when a child has to go.

Right, now that you're ready, here's a basic training bladder control plan:

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- Tell your child that they must tell you if they need to go. The idea behind this is to let your child be in charge of as much of the toilet training process as possible.
- Put your child on the toilet first thing in the morning, before naps, after naps, after meals, after being dry for two hours, and before bedtime. Initially a regular schedule can help with this process.
- Keep them company while they're trying to do their business. You can use this time for reading or just talking. Books about potties are appropriate selections to keep in the bathroom!
- Praise all progress. For some kids, sitting still more than 10 seconds may be progress.

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- Try turning the water on and letting it run for inspiration. Running water can be a great way to inspire your child to let go. Just don't let it run forever. If they're gonna go, they're gonna go. If they're not, they're not. Know when to stop; otherwise, it becomes a game!
- Offer more fluids when you're actively involved in training. The more a child drinks, the more a child will need to urinate and respond to body signals. Every couple of hours tell your child, "it's time to try now."
- Set a timer to remind your child when it's time to go potty rather than doing all the reminding yourself. Use the reminder as a 'before' condition: "after you use the potty, we will ..."
- Consolidate success by maintaining the same routine for several weeks. Keep in mind that even children who have mastered the bathroom procedure may wet their pants during the day for several weeks or months after the initial success. This is totally normal.

If you've followed all reasonable steps for some time without any success, stop! Your child just isn't ready, and if you push too hard, you'll create anxiety that will work against you both. Try again in a few weeks or months.

## Bowel control

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Bowel control is often achieved before bladder control. Parents can usually tell when a bowel movement is about to happen. When they suspect a poop is coming, they can bring their child to the potty to try and go there.

By the same token, some children achieve bladder control before bowel control. It really depends on the child. Ultimately, you'll find what works best for your child.

At some point your child will no longer have bowel movements during the night. They become a daytime process for most children. The more regular your child is, the easier it will be to start bowel control training.

Children often stop playing just before a bowel movement. Some even hide in a favourite spot, or run into their room to poo in private. Others just grunt or go red in the face. Saying, "I see you're trying to poop" and praising your child will help them to identify what's happening and associate those sensations with the process.

If your child has a history of constipation, pooping can be a painful process, and this may delay toilet training for your child. This isn't something to be worried about, you just need to plan for this for your child. Every child is unique, and will toilet train in different ways.

This is a basic plan for how you might train bowel control:

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- Tell your child you'll be taking them to the potty to poop and that they should go there rather than in their nappies. You can say things like, 'this is what grown-ups do, and what you should do because you're getting so big and grown up.' Remember, you want to set really clear expectations.
- Give them advance notice as to when this will start, so they can start to think about it. This is a big change of routine, and they need some lead in time to adjust.

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- If your child has a regular time for a bowel movement, make that the time to go to the bathroom. If they have no regular time, try within 30 minutes after a meal. When the stomach is full, the colon is often stimulated to empty.
- If your child usually goes in their crib, get them to sit on the toilet before you put them down for a nap, or as soon as you hear the stir after waking.
- Be prepared to sit with your child to keep them company. It's important for you to be there to encourage them at this point. Don't insist your child sits for more than a few minutes, but only as long as he or she is comfortable.
- Some children need to be alone to have a bowel movement. Bright bathroom lights and too much conversation may prevent them from relaxing their sphincter muscles. If this is your child adjust to suit.
- Praise your child like crazy for every bowel movement made in the potty or toilet. But also praise your child for sitting there and trying to go too.

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In general, we don't advocate keeping nappies on children who are learning to use the toilet; this just sends mixed messages. Some parents choose to use a nappy for bedtime, to prevent accidents. And other parents choose to continue using nappies. This is perfectly fine, just understand that you're 'allowing' your child to still go in their nappy, and bowel control training may take longer as a result.

It's not uncommon for boys to achieve bladder control before, and sometimes long before, bowel control. Parents sometimes feel a child with belated bowel control is unwilling, uncooperative, or just plain stubborn, but that's rarely the case. Again, patience is called for here.

A really reluctant-relaxer may require different approaches until you find one that works. Consider breaking the task into small, slow steps. Encourage your child to sit on and use the potty (or toilet) with clothes and a disposable nappy on to begin with. After they become comfortable with this procedure, progress to going with only a disposable nappy on. You can then open the sides of the nappy, so they're actually going in the potty.

For a really reluctant child you could insist they stay in the bathroom to go in their nappy, and then empty the nappy into the toilet and flush, as a first step.

## Constipation and encopresis

Constipation is most often a factor in belated bowel control. A child who cries, screams, or kicks when urged to use the potty may be doing so because of the discomfort or pain experienced due to constipation.

In this case, it's not stubbornness, but fear (real or imagined), that's keeping the child from doing what you ask.

Constipation can be diagnosed by the hardness and character of the stool. Dry bowel movements that don't stick to the nappy can be a description of constipation. Chronic (or ongoing) constipation can be painful for the child, which makes them more reluctant to go.

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Encopresis is the term used for a lack of control of bowel movements for anyone over the age of 4. It's not uncommon. In fact it has been reported that 1%-2% of children over the age of 4 are fecally incontinent. For some reason it's more common for boys than girls.

The first step toward treating constipation should be changing your child's diet. However, if you are at all concerned by your child's bowel movements, you should consult your paediatrician, or medical specialist.

## Dietary changes for bowel control

Sometimes your child is simply not able to gain control of his or her bowels. Much of this might have to do with their diet. Here are some dietary changes you may want to look at:

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- Decrease milk products (milk, cheese, ice cream, etc.). Or consider alternatives such as soy milk, or milk with the A2 protein. If you eliminate milk products for any length of time, a calcium supplement is recommended.
- Decrease or eliminate apples, bananas, rice, and gelatin. These are binders and can back a child up. Opt for peaches, prunes, mango or kiwifruit instead.
- Chocolate is a constipating food especially when consumed in quantity.
- Increase whole-grain breads, cereals, muffins, and any other bran foods. Try adding bran to other foods if your child won't eat it at breakfast time. Encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables with skins on, seeds, and berries for the fibre. Fruit nectars are good, too.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of water, and consider decreasing other fluid intake (milk, juices, sodas, etc.), especially around meal times, to increase a child's appetite for bulkier foods.
- Prune juice is an age-old remedy and can be mixed with a small amount of milk.

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Expect to wait two weeks or so before seeing a noticeable change in bowel movements after starting a new diet. Don't resume bowel training until such a change occurs. If your child is still suffering from constipation, consult with a dietitian, or get specialist medical advice.

Just a note here, very loose stools, or a rollercoaster of loose stools, then constipation, may be a sign of other problems (an infection, milk or other food allergy, etc.). Again, consult your doctor, or a dietitian.

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## Daytime training

Your first goal during potty training is to help your child stay dry through the daytime hours. Night time dryness will come a little later since they won't yet be in control of their bodily functions while sleeping.

A routine will help make your child more confident and comfortable during potty training. In fact, having your child on a schedule before training time makes the transition easier.

By the age of one, your toddler should be on a regular schedule of eating, sleeping, playing and having nappy changes. These regular nappy changing times will prepare your toddler for a regular potty schedule in the future.

Make frequent trips to the bathroom. Obviously you can't force your child to pee or poop, but you can encourage them to practice. Get them to sit on the potty for 2 to 4 minutes every couple of hours. Schedule these sittings close to times your child usually has a bowel movement or wets themselves, such as just after a meal or snack, and before and after a nap.

Don't worry if they aren't able to go in the potty at this stage. The goal here isn't to actually potty train, but just to set up a regular schedule. This will help come real training time.

Also, make sure your child is an active participant in this part. Let them practice lowering or raising their nappy, getting out the potty, pretend wiping with toilet paper, and flushing the loo. It's all about familiarity and routine.

Remember, this is probably not going to be an overnight process. Be patient with your child and back off if you're getting resistance at this early stage. This is a great indication of your child's readiness. Don't push too hard. Just go back to their normal routine for a couple of weeks, before trying again.

We totally agree with experts that a reward system is almost necessary during this important time.

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## Giving rewards

Not all parents are into the whole reward thing, and that's totally OK. It also doesn't work with every child. But there's plenty of evidence to show that most kids react positively towards reward systems. And potty training really lends itself to rewards.

Your reward system needs to fit your child's personality and contain incentives important to them to be effective.

We mentioned before placing a potty chart on your refrigerator or in your bathroom. This works really well. When your child successfully goes on the potty, let them place a sticker on the chart. If they reach a certain amount of stickers, give them a small prize or a special trip.

You can add extra incentives too. So one line on your potty chart could be for sitting on the potty for 2 minutes. Another line for successfully pulling up their nappy or pants. Another line might be for actually urinating in the potty. And you could do another for flushing the toilet, or washing their hands correctly.

Perhaps instead of a chart, you could make a picture of a road leading to a specific place, like 'Candy Land'. The idea here is to make it down the road by going on the potty each day for a week. When they get to their destination, they get a special treat.

Try involving your child in making the chart or poster too. They can decorate it with glue sticks and glitter, or whatever feels right for your child. This is a really cute way to teach your child about staying on track while trying to reach a goal.

If you're unsure about what will work as an incentive, ask your child what they'd like as a reward. They know what they like best, and if they want it bad enough, they'll sure work hard to get it!

Gradually phase out the rewards as your child's bathroom visits become routine. You don't want the reward to become an expectation of going to the toilet.

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Rewards are great, but the ultimate reward for your toddler has to be your approval. The best way we can show our approval is with praise.

## Giving praise

Praising words serve many functions for your toddler. They boost their self-esteem, raise their confidence and can be a huge motivator for them. Giving lots of praise can also help calm your child, and reduce their natural tension with this big undertaking.

So dole out the praise as often as you can. Give them positive encouragement each time they sit on the potty, stay dry, wash their hands, etc. And make a HUGE deal for something like when they use the potty, or pull their own pants up for the first time. You just simply can't over-praise your child!

Give physical reinforcement in the form of hugs, or high-fives, while you're giving out the praise. Clap and say things like, 'yea, good for you', 'what a big boy/girl you're turning into', 'you went on the potty – YAY!'.

The more fun you make it, the more positive your child will respond. The more they see how excited you are with their performance, the more they'll want to show you what they can do.

Accidents are going to happen. If your child has an accident, don't make a big deal about it and definitely try not to get angry. If you do this, it will seriously chip away at their morale. A good rule of thumb to remember is that 1 negative reinforcement will undo 10 positive ones.

When your child does have an accident, just help them get it cleaned up and forget about it. You may even want to say something encouraging like, 'hey, that's alright, I just know you'll make it to the potty next time.'

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## Good hygiene during training

Make sure to change your child's underwear or nappy, as soon as possible after soiling. You don't want them to become comfortable with, or even enjoy, the feeling of being soiled. This will just work against you in the long run.

Teach your child how to wipe properly. Girls should wipe thoroughly from front to back to prevent bringing germs from the rectum to the vagina or bladder. Teach your girl to go "pat, pat, pat" instead of wiping hard. This can help reduce irritation or possible rashes.

Show boys how to point their penis down to avoid spraying the room. Sometimes this can be easier to learn in a sitting position. You may want to consider painting a target on the potty chair, or toilet, so that he can practice his aim.

Consider using pre-moistened wipes for potty training. These are ideal for young users because they gently and effectively clean their delicate skin, while providing the strength and absorbency to accomplish the task. The thought of rough toilet paper can put a child off, and create another barrier to your success.

Take the time to show your child how to wash their hands. Hand washing is a key way to reduce the spread of disease. Use an antibacterial soap, or handwash, and warm water. Make sure to scrub the tops and bottoms of hands, and in between the fingers and fingernails, for at least 20 seconds.

A great way to teach children how long to wash their hands for is to have them recite a poem. The ABC song, or 2 rounds of Row, Row, Row Your Boat is about right.

They should dry their hands on a towel (which should be laundered at least on a weekly basis), and they should dry for as long as they wash. Drying hands completely is really important for good hygiene.

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Hand washing should be done routinely, even if your child doesn't actually 'go' in the potty. This will reinforce the behaviour you expect. Also, don't forget to wash YOUR hands to practice what you preach.

Clean your potty periodically with a bleach/water solution to keep it super-clean. This needn't be done after every use. Perhaps include it as part of your regular bathroom cleaning routine.

## Night time training

Night time training is more difficult because it depends on your child's ability to hold their urine for an extended period of time. The urge to go is often difficult for them to notice when sleeping, so getting up in the middle of the night may not happen for them.

Start by limiting fluid intake right before bed. Some parents rely on the night bottle to calm a child for sleep. So this does create a problem. You could try by reducing the quantity in the bottle a little each night. And then 'forgetting' about it for a few nights.

Keep bedtime calm. Of course this seems obvious enough. But the risk of bedwetting can be increased if your child engages in lots of rough housing or even an exciting TV program close to bedtime. When kids are excited, they tend to produce more urine. So set up a calming-down routine at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

Often a warm bath can bring on the urge of peeing. So this is a good option before bedtime, as it helps to calm a child at the same time.

Make sure, before your child goes to bed, they try to go to the toilet one last time. You might get some protests here, but this is a crucial part of the bedtime routine to prevent bedwetting at night.

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You should consider not using nappies at night time. This is probably the biggest hurdle for parents to overcome! Expecting a child to stay dry all night, and then putting a nappy on them, really does send mixed messages.

Some parents opt for using training pants until a child can stay dry through the night. Then, after a week of dry nights, trialling wearing underwear at night. This can certainly work too.

Importantly though, it's really difficult for a child to tell if they're wet or not in a nappy. Sleeping in underwear helps your child to feel when they're wet, and to send those thoughts to their brains, even in their sleep.

Again, accidents will happen. Sorry, but it's just part of the process (unless you're just very, very fortunate!). So be prepared for unexpected night visits. When your child does have an accident they'll probably be uncomfortable and will either call out to you, or get out of bed to pay you a visit.

As you might have guessed by now, this process does involve an increase in laundry and bed making! We highly recommend investing in a mattress protector. These special fitted-sheets made from plastic prevent the bed from becoming sodden.

Here's some more useful tips that might help both you and your child to get through night time training:

Make sure the way to the bathroom is lit, even if only with night-lights. A dark hallway can really put off a child from getting out of bed. You may want to invest in an automatic sensor light.

Keep the house warm during this period, so your child won't avoid getting up because it's too cold. Snuggling back under the covers after waking is a sure-fire way to have a late night accident.

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Consider keeping a potty near your child's bed. This one won't be for everyone, but it can certainly make things easier for some.

Practice 'positive imaging' as you put your child to sleep. Help them imagine staying dry all night and waking up dry in the morning. Talk up the pleasure of feeling dry, and in control and grown-up.

Try whispering 'dry' ideas into the ear of a sleeping child. This is something psychologists say children are often receptive to such 'idea planting' during certain periods of sleep.

Consider hypnosis for your child. We regularly sell [hypnosis products for bedwetting](#) and have heard good results from parents.

If (when) your child does have an accident, try not to make a big deal about it. Some parents get their child to help strip or remake the bed. This is fine, but it **MUST** be done in a positive and constructive way. Definitely don't make your child feel bad, or they'll become frustrated at being punished for something they can't control.

We've already mentioned a mattress protector. But for children that continue to soil the bed, you may want to consider a [bedwetting alarm](#). These have come a long way in the last 20 years, are based on solid research, and now even come with interactive apps!

It's important to note here that some children may have a physical problem. So if bedwetting becomes a real struggle after a certain period of time, you may want to consult with your doctor.

## Regression

Regression is as normal to potty training as for any other milestone (sleeping, eating, walking, etc.) in a toddler's hectic little life. In fact, the child that doesn't have some sort of regression is in the minority. So you should plan for this.

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Regressions can be as small as 1 or 2 days where your child doesn't quite make it to the loo. Or more significant, where you're right back to changing nappies again. It's all very normal, and part of the process.

Think about it in the same way as you learn. We use the term '2 steps forward, 1 step back' to describe it. Sometimes learning seems easy, but then we get stuck on a step, we have to keep relearning the same step over and over, until it 'sticks'. Other times, we get right through learning a process, only to 'forget it', and then need to relearn the whole process.

This is totally natural, and just how humans learn. Usual learning can be described more as lumpy, than linear. So expect the same lumpy sort of learning process to happen with your child.

Let's start with the small setbacks first. Distraction is one of the main causes of regression. Most children get so involved in play time, projects, books, or TV shows, etc. that they 'forget' to go, and just let go right there on the carpet. Other scenarios include in the car, or out shopping, etc. where they're too distracted and forget to tell you they need to go.

Excitement is another cause such as new visitors, rough housing, playing on the tramp, etc. where it just creeps up on them. Often they'll realise they need to go too late, and not quite make it to the bathroom in time.

This can be really embarrassing for your child, and sometimes really upsetting too. It's really important to stay calm and tell your child that it's OK, they've done nothing wrong. Clean up the mess with as little fuss as possible, and give some encouragement to your child, by telling them, 'this is totally normal, you'll make it next time.'

More major regressions can be triggered by all sorts of events and fears, real or imagined. You may have heard about the toilet cleaner brand that won the 'worst advert of the year' award. The ad featured green, oozing cartoon germs living under the lid. Toddlers can't really tell the difference between TV and reality. And, sure enough, there were kids regressing all over the country with a new fear of the germs living in their toilets!

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Some other regression-triggering events may include:

- Nightmares, or night terrors
- Lack of positive self-talk (yep, even toddlers have this!)
- Fear of punishment, or loss of approval, if they have an accident
- A major routine change such as starting school or day care, dropping their afternoon nap time, or having a change in caregiver
- A major change at home such as the death of a pet, moving house, parents separating, birth of a sibling, or a parent going back to work.

The key here is to work closely with your child to find out what has caused the regression. Even small things can really build up in a child's mind and quickly become real fears. You'll then need to slowly work back through that fear to set up a more positive outlook.

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Plan for regressions whenever there's a major change coming such as outlined above, and don't let a regression linger. You'll want to work with your child to nip it in the bud as quickly as possible.

Resolving a regression really depends on how major it is. A small accident might be a one-off, that never occurs again. If it becomes more regular, or creates an issue, you'll child will need to relearn some skills.

You basically have 2 courses of action from here. You can either let your child work through it themselves, supported by lots of encouragement, or you can get involved and help retrain them.

If you decide you need to intervene, a reward chart can be a great motivator here. Instead of the usual potty training chart, where they get a sticker for going to the toilet, here they get a sticker for going a day without an accident. Getting through a week without an accident means they get a reward.

Even if you didn't use a potty training chart when you first went through potty training, you might want to consider trying one now. As long as the incentive at the end of the week is strong enough, you'll be surprised at how quickly they relearn!

As soon as the correct behaviour has been re-established, you'll want to stop using the chart. You don't want to create a causal link between accidents and rewards.

If the regression is more serious, keep working your way backwards through potty training. You may need to go back to a set routine of taking your child to the bathroom every few hours, after meals, before and after bedtimes to 'reset' their behaviour. If your child had progressed to an adapter seat, or the toilet, you may need to go back to the potty.

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Going back through the potty training steps in this way allows your child to relearn these skills. It allows your child to take a step back to something they remember, and then move forward toward the desired behaviour. It also reinforces your expectations, and your encouragement and praise will get them back on the right track in no time at all.

We should note here that there's a third set of events that can cause a regression. These are caused by really significant events in your child's life. Sometimes, in small children, incontinence is one of the first signs your child is experiencing something like this.

These events can seriously impact your child's development. Some examples include repetitive night terrors, something significant experienced at school like bullying, a deep-seated fear caused by pain or embarrassment, and even situations of physical, or mental abuse.

If you're even the slightest bit concerned about your child's behaviour here, you should consult your paediatrician, or seek specialist help immediately.

## Helping a child who really resists

If you've been trying to encourage your child to go on the potty, and they just won't cooperate, don't worry – you're not alone! Some kids just don't embrace the whole potty training experience. But there are some things you can do to help them along their way!

First, ask them why they don't want to use the potty. Sometimes, misconceptions or real fears stand in the way of successful toilet training.

Another technique is to have your child draw a picture of a bathroom. Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand. You may get some clues about worries or fears the child is repressing.

If you discover something here, that's great, you can work through this mental block with your child. Just take your time.

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What else can you try? Take a look at these time-tested tricks:

- Turn on the taps. Some parents find it helpful early on in training to turn on the taps in the bathroom as a stimulus to urinate. Hey, if it works for adults it will work for kids too.
- Try the ‘warm water’ trick. Once the child is sitting on the potty, fill a large bowl with lukewarm or tepid water. Place some new ‘potty’ toys in the bowl and set it in front of the child. When they place their hands in the lukewarm water to play with the toys, they may nearly go instantly.
- Place targets in the toilet. This tip works best for boys. Many parents put objects in the toilet so boys have something to aim for. Small squares of toilet paper with bulls-eyes drawn on work well. This ‘game’ can really motivate some action.
- Sing a song. Singing a song, or telling a story, for your child will help you pass the time and keep them interested in staying in the bathroom. Some parents go so far as to create a potty song to make their child feel more comfortable in the bathroom. It’s fun, and really helps to reduce tension.

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- Let your child run naked. Allow your child to run around naked when you're at home. We're big fans of this technique. Removing the nappy helps your child to feel natural sensations. It also helps the parent to see what's going on with the child.
- Try a pee-pee tree. Again, one for the boys. You might find a really resistant boy relishes the chance to go a bit wild, and pee a-la natural! Just give a thought to the neighbours.
- Seek advice and support online. Talk to other parents about their success and failures on online discussion boards. Post a message, ask a question, and exchange information about potty training. It's a great learning experience!
- Be sure your child's caregivers follow the same routine you've established. Let them know what you're doing and how you're handling any issues you're encountering. Ask them to use the same techniques so your child won't be confused.
- Your pediatrician's help, advice, and encouragement can help make toilet training easier. Also, your pediatrician is trained to identify and manage problems that are more serious. If you're ever concerned, follow your intuition and get some specialist help.

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## Training on the road

If you need to leave home for an extended period of time for any reason, know that traveling makes potty training much more challenging. While you don't want to schedule any long vacations during your expected training period, sometimes things come up and you must travel.

This section also applies where your child might be mostly potty trained, but not quite there yet, or perhaps is experiencing a regression. You don't want to cancel that planned trip to the beach, just because potty training has taken longer than expected.

Also, we want to plan ahead for possible regressions, and travelling is one of those events. The change in routine and environment is certainly enough to trigger a step backward in a trained child.

Make sure your child leaves home empty (this rule applies for all travel for most kids, even just going out to the shops). This means they go potty before leaving the house. Lots of kids will try and fight this one, saying they don't need to go. Make them, unless you want to be pulling over at the first service station.

Also, try to limit the liquids on the road. For longer trips your child will need hydration of course. Try to limit any liquids until the second half of the trip. Or, break up the trip with a leg stretch and toilet stop.

Resist the urge to put them in a pull up. Your child's a big kid now. Putting a nappy on them at this stage will just cause confusion. You're definitely not going to be the first parent to have an accident en route, and most people involved in the travel and hospitality industry are used to dealing with this.

Definitely take along your child's potty chair or adapter seat. Little bladders can require frequent pit stops and knowing their own chair is packed will help ease their tension.

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If you can't, or don't want to, pack the potty chair, try to make sure this isn't your child's first experience of a new toilet. Going from the relative comfort of their own potty and bathroom, to a big, noisy, brightly lit public toilet is a big ask.

Carry extra tissues and sanitizing gel for public bathrooms. You don't want to be caught short.

Wherever possible, choose the handicap or family bathroom. You'll have extra room and be able to move more freely to help your child.

Always, always accompany your child into public restrooms. Safety is nothing to take for granted – even while potty training.

Consider packing your mattress protector as a precaution. Motels will usually cater for this, but friends and families homes may not.

Watch your child's diet while on the road. A change in diet on family vacations is likely to bring about a change in bowel habits, either constipation or diarrhea, and a corresponding slump in training progress.

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## Physical complications

We've already addressed the issue of constipation above, but there are other physical complications to consider too. Physical problems can be confusing for your child. They know they should be going on the potty, but their body just isn't cooperating.

If you suspect a physical problem, of course, you should take your child to their physician. But what should you look out for? Well, there's a number of things that could be going on:

Consider the possibility of an allergy. Lactose intolerance (the inability to digest milk or milk products) is the most common, but other foods can cause allergies, too.

Some sugar-free snacks contain Sorbitol. Sorbitol is a culprit in chronic loose stools. It's also found naturally in pear juice and apple juice, which could make a difference if your child drinks a lot.

Watch for signs of urinary infections. These include pain or burning sensations while urinating, straining to urinate, color changes in the urine, foul-smelling urine, frequent urination that produces very little, or a split stream of urine. Other signs might be abdominal pain or a fever. Such infections are not uncommon in small children.

Be aware that even after a urinary problem has cleared up, the child may still remember and fear the pain of urinating, which may complicate potty training and cause a regression.

A significant increase in urination can be a sign of diabetes. This would certainly impact on potty training.

## Potty training a special needs child

Just like with all children, you need to be sure your child is fully able to understand their bodily functions and what to do with those feelings when they arise. Depending on the needs of your child, this may be around the time other children train, or much later.

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Regardless the time frame, taking oneself to the toilet is a major achievement for a child, and provides a new sense of freedom. The perseverance will certainly pay off.

All of the steps outlined above for day and night time training apply here too. The main difference is that we suggest keeping a written journal. You'll need to do a clear task analysis and break down each process. And then record your child's success in achieving each task.

This written record will be invaluable if you need to call in support, or to discuss with a specialist. The tasks might include some of the following:

- Recognizing when they need to go to the bathroom
- Getting to, and entering the bathroom
- Manipulating clothing closures
- Pulling pants down
- Sitting on the toilet
- Going to the toilet
- Using paper correctly

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- Pulling pants up
- Flushing the toilet
- Washing hands correctly
- Drying hands correctly

You'll obviously need to make these tasks relevant for your child's environment, and any of the above tasks might need to be broken down into more steps to work through.

The resource [\*potty training the special needs child\*](#) comes from the American Academy of Paediatrics, and has lots more information, including a breakdown of different needs.

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## Training for multiples

Potty training multiple children of the same age is like gearing up for an Olympic event! It involves more equipment, more training time, more mess, and parents who possess an amazing degree of patience.

Although you'll encounter some unique roadblocks, you'll also have the advantage of peer pressure. Siblings can have a huge influence on each other. Just be careful to craft an environment of active encouragement and friendly competition. Here's a few tips, and some things to consider:

- One potty chair won't cut it. Training is stressful enough as it is without asking your multiples to share the potty.
- Let your multiples express their own individuality with their own chair. Whether that means letting them choose their own throne, or perhaps decorating a generic potty with their own stickers or decals.
- Because establishing a routine is the best way to potty train your child, you may want to develop some sort of game to keep the routine going and enjoyable. Read up on 'gamification' tactics and find out how to build in rewards to keep up the momentum.
- When training multiples you may choose not to go nappiless. Unless you have someone around to help out here, things could get messy.

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- There's a fair bit of chaos with toddler multiples in the house, so it's going to be harder for you to get them to notice their body's signals. This probably means longer sessions on the potty. Let them bring toys or books into the bathroom to get more time in sitting on the potty.

What if you have one child who's interested in potty training and another one who isn't? You may want to try and actively dissuade their interest until the other catches up.

If you do have to train separately, be careful that one child doesn't receive an imbalance of praise and rewards, or the other child may feel inferior.

The same logic applies here when training together. If you're using a rewards-based system, be careful to make sure rewards are doled out fairly evenly, or you could find one child rebels.

You may also be faced with some regression issues with one of your children. If this happens, build in plenty of one-on-one time for that child.

A regression is a really personal, and sometimes emotional, journey for a child. For multiples, the toilet-trained sibling will just amplify these feelings. Without the right amount of guidance, a regression could develop into a bigger issue, or inferiority complex.

If your children are training on different schedules, this is the perfect opportunity to teach your multiples about encouragement. Getting encouragement, and praise, from a sibling is a powerful motivator.

Having each of your multiples encourage the other at each step is also a great way to reduce the competitive factor.

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Don't be afraid to ask for help! If your children start resisting, and you become frustrated or angry, this will only hinder their progress. You might find another pair of hands during this crucial milestone is a necessity.

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## Conclusion

The day will come where you look at your child in amazement and pride realising something has clicked. Something has registered. Your child has initiated - without reminding - going to the potty. This is a big day!

But, you must be patient. Most children take quite a long time before they actually 'get it'. It'll take up lots of your time and a fair bit of energy. It only lasts a while though, before you know it you're getting on with life without having every waking moment revolve around pooping and peeing.

Remember that potty training is not about the potty, it's about control. Your child is learning how to command control of their bodily functions *with their mind*. It's one of the hardest things they'll learn as a toddler.

So relax, and have fun, and work together through this major milestone!

The following websites were referenced in researching this book:

[www.about.com](http://www.about.com)

[www.today.com](http://www.today.com)

[www.pottytrainingtips.com](http://www.pottytrainingtips.com)

[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)

[www.kiwifamilies.com](http://www.kiwifamilies.com)

[www.medix21.co.nz](http://www.medix21.co.nz)

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

## Bonus material

### **What is bedwetting (or nocturnal enuresis)?**

Night time wetting is one of those problems talked about frequently when it relates to toddlers but rarely when it comes to school age children and even less when it's a teenage issue.

But the problem is out there and it's more common than you may think.

While most children are dry at night by around 3 years, 10% of 5-year-olds are regular bedwetters. If a 5-year-old is distressed about wetting it may help him to know that there are probably two more children in his class who also wet at night even though they are unlikely to let their friends know.

Night wetting – or enuresis – is more common in boys than girls. It is quite rare in teenagers, but it does occur. The first step is to make sure that there isn't a medical reason for the problem, or some other source of anxiety that may be causing the child to wet. If those things have been discounted, time will be the answer.

Most parents who have been through this problem and have tried all the “cures” say that, in the end, maturation takes care of it – it just takes some children longer.

### **What causes bedwetting?**

- It tends to run in families (it may help your child to know if this was a problem for his/her parent)

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- Deep sleep – difficulty waking up
- A slower than normal development of the central nervous system that reduces the child's ability to stop their bladder emptying at night
- A reduced level of antidiuretic hormone which reduces the amount of urine made by the kidneys
- Urinary tract infection
- Abnormalities in the urethral valves or ureter, or the spinal cord
- Small bladder (thought to affect up to 85% of children with enuresis).

## **What treatments are available?**

Here are some practical solutions that can help:

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- If the child has a small bladder it can help to encourage them to drink more during the day (preferably water, sugared drinks can irritate the bladder) and to practise holding their urine for longer periods.
- Some parents have found [hypnosis](#) to be very effective.
- Some children are helped by an [alarm system](#) (available from most pharmacies). The alarm sounds when the child starts to wet and teaches them to respond to bladder sensations.
- A reward system for dry nights may encourage younger children.
- Your doctor may suggest some medicines for older children if other methods haven't worked.

## **Strategies on how you can help**

It's important your child doesn't feel guilty about something he/she can't control. A school aged child may feel embarrassed about wetting and be reluctant to spend the night away from home especially on sleepovers, school camps etc.

Have a private face-to-face discussion with your child in order to elicit their true feelings, acknowledge those feelings, and reassure that you're there to help and support your child.

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For camps, one option is to put a pull-up in the child's sleeping bag for them to wriggle into after lights out. Put a plastic bag in their toilet bag for them to dispose of the pants in the morning. Let a teacher or parent on camp know about the possibility of wetting and let your child know who to go to if they have concerns while away.

When staying overnight with a friend, put a pull-up in the child's toilet bag and tell them to take it with them to the toilet at bedtime to put the pants on in private. The plastic bag system in the morning will work here too. **Real parents problem #1 - Regular soiling by an older child**

*Miss L is 7 and continually soils her undies (heavy skid marks) and once at the local pools, pooed her togs. We thought this was because she was lazy and didn't want to leave the fun to go to the toilet. We considered that this might be the case also with the skid marks in her pants as she often doesn't eat her lunch at school in favour of playing. However, nothing we seem to be doing to discourage her is working and I am wondering if there is a deeper issue here. She also wets her bed at night.*

Firstly, thank you for your email and for reaching out for help for yourselves and Miss L.

Soiling and bedwetting, while unpleasant, are relatively common issues in young children, with some children simply taking more time than others to become consistently dry and clean throughout the day and night.

If the problems continue to persist after the age of 7, however, it's a good idea to look more comprehensively at the underlying causes and to seek support and guidance.

Without more comprehensive details it's difficult to pinpoint what the likely cause of Miss L's bed wetting and soiling may be, as there could be a number of factors involved.

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## Understanding soiling and bedwetting in children

Here are some steps to getting more information about what is happening with Miss L:

- Make an appointment with your GP to rule out any physical or medical factors that may be contributing to the problem.
- Keep a detailed record of times when the issue occurs so that patterns and factors can be identified.
- The information you collect in your records will help your doctor point you in the best direction and indicate where to go next, if they can not help you directly, whether that is a medical specialist, a psychologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, counsellor or coach.

## To manage the soiling and bedwetting with Miss L:

- Acknowledge that there's a reason for the issue, whether physical or psychological, even if the exact cause is never discovered, and remove the guilt, shame and stress associated with bedwetting and soiling.
- Position yourself as a supportive ally and focus on helping Miss L figure out what's going on, work towards a solution and help her develop skills and strategies to manage the issue.

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- Involve her in the decision-making and process. Kids have more insight into what's going on than we think. Even if they can't verbalise these insights, involving them in problem solving is worth the effort.
- Teach her practical strategies to help her minimise and manage the issue: going to the toilet before she plays, listening to her body signals, slowing down when she cleans herself. Some children benefit from revisiting the 'basics' of toilet training and personal hygiene.
- Teach her practical strategies to manage the issue, when and if it occurs so that she knows what to do, how to do it and can minimise any embarrassment associated with accidents.

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- Keep it simple. Start with the easiest solutions and strategies first and work your way forward from there, tracking progress, celebrating successes and making adjustments as necessary as you go.
- Stick with what works. If having a night-light helps her manage night time toilet trips then buy a night-light she can take with her wherever she stays the night. Some children who experience nighttime bed wetting as a result of not waking up when they need to go, benefit from training aids, such as bed wetting alarms.
- Help her develop some relaxation and stress management strategies.
- While it is a challenging issue to manage, keeping focused on solutions rather than problems and remembering that Miss L is not the problem – she is having a problem, can go a long way towards reducing the stress.
- Continue to keep the lines of communication open and give her the opportunity to air her worries and find solutions. Here, it really helps to focus on the things we can control and manage our thoughts and feelings regarding the things we can't control.

There is a lot you can do to help Miss L but you don't have to go it alone and can't be expected to have all the answers and solutions – continue to reach out for help and support starting with a visit to your local GP. And trust that with the right strategies and support that Miss L will work her way through this in time.

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## Real parents problem #2 - School aged child not toilet trained

*I am writing and desperate for help with our precious five year old daughter. She started school in November 2012. She is still not toilet trained (wees and poos) and at the end of last term we had to put her back into pull ups to go to school as she keep wetting her knickers in the classroom/on the carpet. We've tried EVERYTHING to get her to go to the toilet. Loads of encouragement, sticker charts, rewards, celebrating and new princess knickers etc. We've tried ignoring it until she told us she was wet/dirty, making her clean herself up. Telling off, reminding, not reminding, homeopathy... She simply does not seem to care if she wees and poos in her knickers, all over new (and highly desired clothes), at school, at the shops, in front of friends etc.*

*We have given each of the things I have mentioned above a good go to give them a chance to work. Nothing does. The only time I can remember that she did pretty well was when we were on holiday and I was asking her to go to the toilet every couple of hours. She's always worn pull ups to bed. She decided she no longer wanted to wear nappies just before she turned three and was doing well. She started having lots of accidents and it's been a roller coaster ride ever since. We haven't noticed any patterns that relate to changes in food or sleep or her day etc. Aside from this problem she is a completely normal and delightful child. Not on any medication nor does she have any behavioural issues. We took her to our GP late last year and had x-rays, ultrasounds and urine tests to make sure nothing physical was causing it – all tests were clear. Any advice would be greatly appreciated. I don't know how we are going to start the new school term with this problem.*

Although, most parents feel that they are the only one with this problem, this mother is certainly not on her own. Having her child thoroughly checked out is a good start so we can be clear that there is no physiological or medical barrier to her knowing when her body needs to wee or poo.

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If you are having an issue like this, a question worth asking yourself is: “How well does my child cope with ordinary requests to come to the table, get dressed, tidy up, got to bed etc?”

If you find yourself answering that she is not particularly good at tolerating the very ordinary frustration of stopping what she prefers doing and doing something that a parent asks of her, you may find yourself with the key to her toileting problem

If a child is still wetting and soiling at this age and there is no medical or physiological problem, the odds are very high that she keeps putting off going because she doesn't want to stop what she is doing and, when she cannot hang on any longer, she wets or poos. The solution is to hold her responsible for her own lack of responding and to inconvenience her so that she eventually decides that it is worth listening to her body's need to go in the first place.

Each time she has wet patches or skid marks or doesn't smell good (and, of course, if she has wet or poo-ed), clean her up and then park her in her room. Say crossly, “Now! I've got a lot of cleaning up to do. You wait here” and close the door. Go and clean up whatever you need to and then have a cup of coffee till you have cooled down. Stroll back to her room, open the door and say, ‘You can come out now!’ and leave the door open.

If you do this every time she has ignored her body signals, she will rapidly learn that it is more convenient to go when he body signals to her that it needs to go.

You will notice that there are no rewards, punishments or endless futile discussions – merely holding a child accountable for something she is well capable of being responsible for.

After just a couple of days of using this approach, this mother has noticed an improvement in her daughter's toileting. So, while it's early days, I hope this will help to make things easier for everyone!

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## Real parents problem #3 - 3 year old boy won't go in the toilet

*My son is 3 years old and is very much resisting toilet training.*

*My husband and I have done all the things recommended on the Kiwi Families website and in the books we have read – he has watched us since he was 2, talks about using the toilet, flushes with us, has done #2's in the potty twice and watched them flush, he can understand instructions, he chose his 'big boy' underwear, he chose the stool to get up to the toilet, he decided to give his potty away to a baby because big boys go on the toilet, and he sits on the toilet whenever we ask (at first he got a star for this on his chart, he doesn't now as he doesn't want one apparently!) but he never actually goes.*

*It has been a week of him sitting on the toilet in the morning and after preschool. I'm hoping to have hourly attempts over the weekend and I have rewards (\$2 shop toys) all lined up for if he goes. Preschool are helping by taking him to the toilet every hour, but nothing. He has not done a wee or poo in the morning or evening AT ALL for the last week – he holds on until he is in bed, or until he is at preschool.*

*He has never had a predictable routine when it comes to toileting so I haven't been able to base it on when he 'normally' goes. Until this week I would have said he still didn't understand the feeling of needing to pee, but now that he has been holding on, I think that's not true – in the past he would have peed on the floor at least once in the four hours between pre-school pick up and bedtime due to not recognising the feeling.”*

How frustrating. This poor mum (and dad) were doing everything right and yet, it was not working for them, or their son.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

Through our email communication we established that there were no major changes in his life, no new siblings in the past six months, no house moves, change of nursery/childcare or routine, injury or illness all of which can create issues around toilet training for children.

We established the signs of being ready for toilet training:

- Has an awareness and interest of the toilet/potty, it's use and other's using it.
- Has long dry spells, including waking up from naps with a dry nappy.
- Can follow simple instructions.
- Can, or almost can pull trousers up and down on their own.
- Has signs or words for a wee and poo.
- Is aware, or becoming aware of when they are doing it (this can include going still, looking serious, hiding, grunting or other noises).
- Dislikes having a wet or dirty nappy.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

- Is generally co-operative.
- Is well in themselves (not ill, teething or struggling with something emotionally)

I went with my instinct which was hard to follow, but hard to ignore. This family was looking for results and what I told them was going to give them the opposite of that, this is what I had to say:

**Baby Listener:** I would suggest stopping for now. He is resisting and not comfortable. I would acknowledge this with him and say something like, “Sweetie, it seems like you are just not comfortable or ready right now to be going for a wee or a poo on the toilet so we can wait a bit longer until you feel a bit more ready, you can use the toilet whenever you would like to, but Mummy and Daddy won’t ask you for a while, is that OK?”

**Mum:** We did this last night and this morning he said “I’m still a little boy, I like my nappies, but I can tell you when I want to be a big boy” so he took it all in – thank you!

**Baby Listener:** Then, your job would be to keep any emotion out of it (if there was any building). He either does it, or doesn’t do it and both are OK. No big praise or upset. I think he is trying to control it all and holding onto it is just not healthy. In a month or so, maybe longer he will more than likely show an interest. This could happen anywhere and anytime!

Resistance with pressure (even just a smidge) can be counter productive. All of the children I have looked after and toilet trained have been done in 3 days. No nonsense, no rewards, no emotions, just running around with mostly bare bums at around 2.5 years (mostly boys too) because they showed all the signs and there was a quiet window of being able to stay home.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

The times I have toilet trained (in the spring/summer I might add) I would have a potty handy (outside) and whenever I noticed them peeing on the ground/paddling pool/garden, I would unemotionally say “when you get that feeling, that is when you need to go to the potty/toilet, OK?”

Then they would become aware of the feeling, or look at me before peeing on the ground etc.... and then I would say, “You needed to go to the potty, didn’t you?”

Things then progressed to almost making it, and then making it – every time. Then as quickly as it started to work, the potty went away and it was a matter of them learning to hold on long enough to get to the inside toilet. This all happened within the 3 days. The potty was used for only a day or two at most.

**Mum:** He did a wee on the floor last night and I said that to him and he put his hand low down on his tummy and said ‘in there’ so I guess that’s good.

**Baby Listener:** Another reason I would stop is that you have tried everything and it hasn’t worked. You have followed the rules and he is not playing the game. Change the game completely. Let him lead and go from there. If you get three months down the line and he is still not interested, then reassess, but for now you have time to relax yourself and allow him to relax about it also. Any anxiety you have he will pick up on and feed off it.

**Mum:** Best advice ever – change the game because we’re not winning. We were too caught up in it to step back and see that. Thank you so much! If it comes to the end of September and we haven’t had any success, I’ll be in touch re: a consult.

The next day I got this reply:

**Mum:** After preschool today in the car he was quiet which is highly unusual! And then said “I will tell you and Dad when I am ready to wear big boy undies OK Mum?” in quite a questioning wee voice to which I said “Of course darling, whenever you’re ready, you just tell us”.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

We are yet to get to the end of the three months, so we will see what happens for this family. However, I have learned over the years that life is easier if I follow the child's lead. This doesn't at all mean they rule the roost, but with changes that affect them greatly, allowing them to be integral to the process helps them to be a part of the creation of the new way things will be. This makes them more engaged in the changes taking place. I totally understand that it is hard to trust the process, but sometimes things just aren't working and by taking a step back, or asking for help or the outsider's opinion can make all the difference.

In this situation, the mum and I created a space for respectful communication rather than a full steam ahead battle. This little guy is very aware and his parents are definitely committed to things going smoothly. I predict that it will in fact go according to plan when he is ready to commit.

## Real parents problem #4 - 2 year old girl won't go in the toilet

*Help! We have been trying to potty train our daughter. We have put her in undies and have told her where to go wees etc and this is fine. She is happy to sit on the toilet or potty. However she won't release! She will dance around holding herself until she can't hold it any longer but seems to be petrified of actually going in the toilet. We have praised her up, had Teddies and dolls on the toilet, we have a magic stick, we've poured water in, we've read books etc. Nothing works. She is 2 years and 3 months.*

This is one of those situations where, even though it feels totally counter-intuitive, we have to go backwards in order to go forwards.

Your daughter is toilet-trained in that she knows when she needs to go and can hang on till she gets to where she feels safe and OK. Somehow, the step to weeing on the toilet or potty is too great for her at present. The answer lies in creating small enough steps so that she can progress easily.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

Keep her in undies but the moment she begins “the dance of I need to go”, pop her in pull-ups and let her go and wee wherever feels safe. Once she trusts you to respond to what her body needs, she can come and ask for a pull-up, go off and wee and be changed by a pleasant parent.

Once this has become easy, when she needs to go, pop on her pull-up and take her to the bathroom to wee.

Once this has become easy, begin the third step. She needs to sit on the toilet or potty with her pull-up on to wee.

Most children take themselves to the fourth step. They decide they don't need the pull-up on and just wee in the toilet.

PS. The majority of children progress easily from manageable step to manageable step. Very occasionally, a child finds the last step too great. If your child can happily wee on the toilet or potty but somehow cannot get to the “air on the bottom” stage, you will need to take smaller steps. Start by carving a small hole in the pull-up for her to wee through. Each day make the hole a bit bigger so that your child get used to the feeling of weeing with an increasingly small “cover” area.

# Kiwi Guide to Potty Training

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