



Hazel Cottage
School

OptionsAutism



Part of Outcomes First Group

Developing independence with toileting- Parent/carers booklet



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Developing independence with toileting: toileting awareness & getting started

Children are independent with toileting when they can get on and off the toilet, wipe themselves effectively, manage their clothes and wash their hands without any help. Every child or young person will achieve toileting skills at their own speed, depending on their physical development and level of understanding. It is important to make school, or others that support your child, aware of any changes in development of independence with toileting skills, to allow for consistency in support and routines.

Signs your child is ready to start toilet training

- Children communicate (include gestures/vocalisations/using AAC systems) when their nappy or pants are wet/dirty.
- They can stay dry for at least 1-2 hours at a time
- They show they know when they need to wee or poo. They may show this by crossing their legs, putting their hand between their legs or wriggling up and down or going somewhere hidden.
- They get to know when they're having a wee/poo and may tell you they're doing it.
- They know when they need to have a wee/poo and may say/indicate so in advance

If your child is not ready to start toileting you can support them by:

- Start with doing all nappy/pad changes in in the bathroom, so they begin to associate this room with weeing and pooing. Then encourage your child to start sitting on the toilet, just to get used to it at first when they are clothed, then progressing to when you're changing their nappy. Begin to build this into the routine to support the child to become comfortable sitting on the toilet. Provide lots of praise and encouragement when your child does sit on the toilet.
- Ensure you have at least 3-4 toilet trips a day where nappies are changed, as well as the child being encouraged to sit on the toilet.
- Where possible and as postural stability allows, change your child's nappy/pad standing up in the bathroom.
- Show them that their poo goes from the nappy into the toilet if possible, then flush the toilet. Explain what you are doing every time.
- Once your child is dressed, both wash your hands together. This reinforces the whole toilet routine.
- Talk about your child's nappy changes as you do them, so they understand wee and poo and what a wet nappy means.
- Focus on areas the child can engage with in the process, maximise their engagement in; such as pulling clothing up and down; helping to remove nappy etc. Use a backward chaining: The adult starts the task, and the child finishes off the very last part e.g. If your child is not ready for toileting, this can be applied to handwashing and dressing.
- Name bodily functions and sensations out loud & during care routines (you can also use visuals or relevant ACC): "You're doing a wee", "Your nappy is wet", "Your tummy feels tight/sore, that might mean you need a poo".
- Encourage noticing patterns "you often need a poo after breakfast".
- Encourage noticing sensations discussing what your tummy feels like before a wee/poo.
- Use simple body part songs or books about toileting
- Let them feel wet vs dry i.e (show a clean and used nappy or use dolls with water play nappies).



Tips before starting

- Look at the times your child is most likely to use the toilet for example after meals, when they wake up. You can make a chart/diary for a couple of weeks to establish a pattern of when they wee/poo. Plan a routine you can stick to until it becomes established
- Make sure your child can sit safely and comfortably on the toilet. Use a child-sized seat or insert so that your child can't fall into the toilet. The seat should not be wobbly. Make sure the young person is sitting on the toilet with their feet at hip width apart.
- Good sitting posture is essential for balance and ease of releasing bowel movements, leaning slightly forwards can also ease bowel movements or sitting upright with both legs on a stool to replicate a squatting position.
- Make sure your child's feet are supported. Use a step if they can't reach the floor. It's important that children have a stable base when toileting to support with bearing down.
- There are toileting inserts and steps available at most retailers to support.
- Utilize visual/ACC used for toileting. Have visual sequences available of toileting/washing hands in the bathroom.
- Try and make the bathroom as welcoming as possible, putting stickers on the wall or toys of interest.

Getting started

- Be patient, it can take time for children to get used to the toilet, and results may not be instant.
- Encourage a healthy diet with fibre to support bowel movements to be soft and easy to pass. If you are concerned about bowel and or urinary health contact GP.
- Take your child to the toilet at the times you expect they may need to go (refer to the chart/diary). Keep your planned routine as much as possible.
- Sit your child on the toilet when you think they are likely to have a wee/poo.
- Encourage them to push down gently, this can be encouraged through laughing or blowing into a toy or whistle. If nothing happens, try again later. Blowing activities could include: blowing bubbles, blowing football, floating ball, blowing out pretend candles.
- Make sure the child feels relaxed, allow the child to sit on the toilet for approximately 3-5 minutes if they are having a bowel movement. Avoid rushing them or make them feel like they need to move, as they may not have finished. Ask if they are ok and if they have finished.
- If you find your child is reluctant to sit still on the toilet, sing songs, read a book etc. Never force your child to stay on the toilet. Create a little rhyme or song to say out loud while sitting or doing toileting tasks to support it to be a more pleasurable experience and to aid reducing any anxieties.
- Try and do tasks using the same sequence each time to support predictability and to aid learning the routine. Break the activity down into parts: i.e. taking clothes down, sitting on the toilet, staying on the toilet, wiping their bottom, pulling up clothes, flushing the toilet, washing hands.
- Every small step should be encouraged and celebrated with the child. Use lots of praise and positive reinforcement. Some children respond well to sticker chart.
- Make it as easy as possible for your child to get their clothes off and on: In the early stages of toilet training at home, it is best to just wear pants and a T-shirt or pyjamas. Loose clothes with elasticated waists are easiest.
- Role play activities can support with learning of skills required for toileting role play can support with development of sequencing, try and make the role play as realistic as possible. Role play can be done with the person or with dolls or toys.

Developing independence with toileting: stage 2 wiping

It is important to continue to:

- Be patient, it can take time for children to get used to the toilet, and results may not be instant.
- Encourage a healthy diet with fibre to support bowel movements to be soft and easy to pass. If you are concerned about bowel and or urinary health contact GP.
- Encourage them to push down gently, this can be encouraged through laughing or blowing into a toy or whistle. If nothing happens, try again later. Blowing activities could include: blowing bubbles, blowing football, floating ball, blowing out pretend candles.
- Make sure the child feels relaxed, allow the child to sit on the toilet for approximately 3-5 minutes if they are having a bowel movement. Avoid rushing them or make them feel like they need to move, as they may not have finished. Ask if they are ok and if they have finished.
- If you find your child is reluctant to sit still on the toilet at times, sing songs, read a book etc. Do not force your child to stay on the toilet. Create a little rhyme or song to say out loud while sitting or doing toileting tasks to support it to be a more pleasurable experience and to aid reducing any anxieties.
- Try and do tasks using the same sequence each time to support predictability and to aid learning the routine. Break the activity down into parts: i.e. taking clothes down, sitting on the toilet, staying on the toilet, wiping their bottom, pulling up clothes, flushing the toilet, washing hands.
- Every small step should be encouraged and celebrated with the child. Use lots of praise and positive reinforcement. Some children respond well to sticker chart.
- Routine: Make sure if a routine is started that everyone follows it across home & school to support consistency. An example of a toileting routine could be: child goes to the toilet (e.g. 09:00, 11:00, 13:00 & 15:00). Consider how long they are left on the toilet prior to asking if they are ok and if they have finished. The sequence used when undressing, toileting, wiping, flushing, dressing and washing hands can remain the same to support with clear expectations and consistency, this can help young people know what to expect and support to be consistent.
- Utilize visuals for sequencing for dressing and wiping to support as a reminder for the young person, the same sequences can be used consistently at home and school to support developing independence with dressing, wiping and washing hands.

Developing independence with wiping

- Hand over hand: Use your hand to physically guide the child's hand to do the task. E.g. For wiping, get the child to hold the paper, then guide their hand to reach round and wipe their bottom. This may be a useful approach to try if you are currently providing physical support with wiping your child.
- Backward chaining: The adult starts the task, and the child finishes off the very last part e.g. To teach the child to wipe their bottom after using the toilet: the adult would do most of the wiping and the child would complete the last, "check it's clean" wipe themselves. Gradually encourage the child to start earlier and do more of the task as they get better at it. Using bottom wiping as an example: the child does as much as they can without help – tearing off the required amount of paper, reaching to do the first wipe etc. The adult then helps to finish off and "check it's clean". Gradually encourage the child to do just a little bit more until they can manage the full task without help.

Activities to support development of wiping skills

- You will need a plastic plate and any spread or gravy spread that your child is happy and safe with, taking into account allergies. Put some splodges of spread on the plate, get the child to wipe the spread off the plate using tissue paper. If this is easy, put the spread onto a half inflated, slightly squidgy balloon. Can they wipe it clean now?



- If they will tolerate, try put a blob onto their leg / arm and do the same then try a part of their body they cannot see e.g. the back of their leg.
- Wiping surfaces such as mirrors/counter tops/tables/plates
- Messy play: Completing regular messy play activities can support improving tactile awareness and tolerance of different textures (consider the different texture of wet toilet paper/wipes etc)
- Baking: Baking activities can support with development of tactile processing, alongside core strength, and crossing the midline, all important skills we need for toileting independently.
- Cleaning toys or dolls.
- Toilet paper can be torn into pre-prepared lengths. Ideally the length between the hand and elbow (2-3 squares). Once the child is able to tear off just enough paper you can just go straight from the roll. Before placing the roll on the holder, squash it flat a little this can stop the roll spinning too easily making it easier to tear off paper.
- Toilet paper games: Complete activities and games using toilet roll, this could include; scrunching and ripping toilet roll to create a picture, creating “clothing” using toilet roll, decorating items using toilet roll, creating a fan using toilet roll (folding the toilet roll) pulling/ripping and creating confetti using toilet roll. Using toilet roll enables the young person to feel the texture whilst learning the pulling, ripping, scrunching or folding techniques they will use when learning to wipe themselves.
- Sensory play ideas: soapy water tuff tray play, shaving foam with toys/letters underneath to wipe away, exploring different tactile textures in tuff tray. Make sure this is low pressure and fun encourage the child to explore but do not force them to touch items if they do not want to.
- Play with sticky-tape or stickers. Stick pieces to your child’s body (with their clothes on) and get them to reach and pull them off. Place them on the back pockets, back of shoulders and bottom of their feet. All of these help with learning to reach and balance in the way needed for toileting.
- Play scarf hide-and-seek. Hide a scarf (or a hanky, ribbon or tea-towel) in the child’s pocket / up inside their t-shirt / up a trouser leg etc. Get them to pull it out.
- Role play: To increase learning of skills required for toileting role play can support with development of sequencing, try and make the role play as realistic as possible. Role play can be done with the person or with dolls or toys.

Developing independence with toileting: dressing & hand washing

Children are independent with toileting when they can get on and off the toilet, wipe themselves effectively, manage their clothes and wash their hands without any help. Every child or young person will achieve toileting skills at their own speed, depending on their physical development and level of understanding.

Developing independence with handwashing

- Utilise visual sequences for handwashing, let them tick of each section or mark off each step for visual feedback.
- Use dolls & toys to demonstrate handwashing
- Consider water temperature, make sure this is not too hot or cold for the child
- Make sure they can reach the sink (use stool as necessary).
- Use soft or preferred towels for drying hands
- Some children may struggle with soap due to sensory sensitivities, try out different soaps with the child to find one they can best tolerate & prefers
- Give verbal or visual prompts initially until this becomes part of routine, gradually phase out prompting as they develop independence.
- Praise efforts not just completion for example “good job for getting your hands wet”.



- Encourage hand washing at consistent times: before meals, after the toilet etc.
- Keep the location and environment consistent (same sink/soap/towel etc).
- Use a visual schedule to show daily handwashing times.

Developing independence with dressing

- Start with looser elastic clothing which is easier to get on and off. Use easy grip zips or large hole buttons if fine motor skills are developing.
- Practice dressing with fun dress up costumes outside of toileting to support with developing skills
- Use a backward chaining approach. Backward chaining is a process of breaking a task down into the small steps that make up the whole task. To begin backward chaining, you let the child complete the last step of a task. As they grow in confidence in completing this step, they then are to complete the step before and so on until they are completing the full task independently. This process ensures the task always ends with the child successfully completing the activity.
- Praise efforts and each small step "well done for pulling your pants up".
- Use visual sequences to support.
- Use role play with dolls or toys to rehearse steps in a low-pressure fun manner.

Using a backward chaining approach

What is backwards chaining?

Backward chaining is a process of breaking a task down into the small steps that make up the whole task. To begin backward chaining with dressing, you let the child complete the last step of a task. As they grow in confidence in completing this step, they then are to complete the step before and so on until they are completing the full task independently. This process ensures the task always ends with the child successfully completing the activity.

Socks

1. Pull up sock from above heel
2. Pull up sock from heel
3. Pull up sock from just below heel
4. Pull up sock from mid foot
5. Pull socks up from toes in the sock
6. Place the sock onto toes
7. Place sock at the edge of toes
8. Place sock on with heel in the correct position
9. Grab the socks and place foot in the right position

Pants

1. Pull pants up from mid bottom
2. Pull pants up from just below bottom
3. Pull pants up from knee
4. Pull pants up from ankle
5. Place second foot into the leg hole
6. Place the first leg in the leg hole
7. Put pants on from when they are in front of them
8. Put pants on from when they are placed next to them

Top tips

1. Undressing is an easier skill to learn before dressing.
2. Looser fitting clothing, with minimal zips and buttons is easier to manage.
3. Leave extra time for the tasks you are using backwards chaining, so the child does not feel rushed.
4. Use consistent verbal cues, decreasing them with the child's confidence.
5. Use positive reinforcement throughout the task, ending with positive comments
6. Let the child pick what they would like to wear, to meet their sensory preferences.
7. Build a wardrobe that aligns with the child's sensory preferences.

Tops

1. Pull the top down from when their head and arms are in the top
2. Put on the top when their head, one arm and half of the other arm is through
3. Put on top when their head and one arm is through.
4. Put on the top when their head and half of one arm is through
5. Put on the top when their head is through
6. Put their head through the top
7. Put on the top when it is on their lap

Sensory processing differences & toileting

Everybody processes sensory information a little differently but most of us are able to process the sights, sounds and smells we encounter each day without much difficulty. However, difficulties in sensory integration and processing can make life more challenging and impact on motor coordination, social engagement, emotional regulation and adaptive problem solving. Research shows that sensory processing difficulties in neurodivergent individuals and those that have experienced trauma is frequently reported. These strategies should be considered if their sensory processing difficulties and differences are impacting on their everyday life.

Toileting can be an overwhelming sensory experience for some young people, for others it can be an opportunity to seek additional sensory input from their environment.

Sensory considerations for toileting

- Using wet toilet tissue can increase your child's awareness of sensation around their bottom (ensure these are flushable). Your child can use toilet paper to dry off their bottom afterwards, so they don't get sore.
- If your child is worried about touching poo, try do activities to get them used to touching messy things in everyday activities (sensory play).
- Think about calm lighting and smells such as lavender or chamomile in your bathroom for over-sensitive children. Bright colourful lights and citrus smells may help increase arousal for those children who need it. Let your child choose a smell that you both like.
- Don't force the child to stay in the room when you flush. Shut the lid to reduce the noise of the flush. Let them stand just outside the door while you flush and gradually get them to stand closer until they can do the flush.
- Show your child the workings of the toilet so they can understand what is making the noise.
- Use ear plugs, headphones, earmuffs or ear defenders to block the noise of flushing if required –especially in public toilets. Hand driers usually have a fused switch above them on the wall which can be turned off so they won't startle your child.
- To give you more control over the environment, you can use disabled toilets. You may be able to access a RADAR key online to get access to many locked, disabled toilets.
- If your child struggles to tolerate the smell of cleaning products consider unscented wipes or cleaners, or adding a preferred mild scent such as lavender.
- Keep walls and bathroom environment uncluttered
- If your child struggles to tolerate the feel of the toilet seat, consider a padded insert.
- Allow your child to hold a fidget toy or small object when on the toilet if they struggle to remain seated. Additionally, if you are aware your child seeks lots of movement and you know when they often need a toilet break, encourage movement breaks before toileting.
- For children who seek lots of tactile input during toileting, including water play, provide regular opportunities for messy tactile play throughout the day to support this sensory need to be met and reduce need to sensory seek during toileting activities.

This information is to support parents/carers with the development of independence skills, and some children may need additional support from a health care professional. With any ongoing bladder or bowel difficulties or concerns, consult your GP in the first instance. ERIC is the Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity supporting all children and teenagers with a bowel or bladder problem: <https://eric.org.uk>