When to start potty training

When to start potty training will depend on the individual child. Every child is different; they learn to walk and talk at different times and they learn how to use the toilet at different times too. However, most children are ready to be potty trained between 18 months and 3 years old.

You know your child better than anyone else so don't feel you have to start potty training just because other people think you should.

It has to be the right time for toilet training to start; when you can devote lots of time and effort to it. If you're moving house or there's a new baby on the way, it's probably not the best time to start teaching your child to use the potty.

How do I know if my child is ready to potty train?

Your child needs to be physically ready, so they'll need to be able to sit themselves on the potty and be able to stand up when they've finished.

If your child can follow instructions and let you know what they want or need, that could also be a sign of readiness.

It helps to keep track of your child's wee and poo habits and get an idea of how many times a day they go for a wee and poo. If they can stay dry for an hour or two, they are ready for potty training as their bladder is storing more wee and developing control.

It can be hard to tell if a child is wet as disposable nappies are so good at soaking up wee and keeping it off the skin. A good tip is to put some folded kitchen paper into the nappy which will stay wet when they do a wee. As well as letting you know when they've done a wee, it may also help your child connect the feeling of being wet with weeing.

If your child starts to notice when they've done a wee or a poo it means they are starting to learn the signals their body is giving them – a great time to get ready for potty training.

How do I get my child ready for potty training?

It helps if you can:

1. **Get your child involved** with changing their nappies. Change them standing up, get them to help with their clothing and wash your hands together when you've finished.
2. **Talk about wee and poo**. Tell them if their nappy is wet or dry when you change them and talk about the wee or poo inside.
3. **Keep the nappies in the toilet** and change your child in there so they associate wees and poos with that room.

4. **Plan a reward system** like a sticker chart or lucky dip bag. Reward every little step towards potty training like getting dressed or washing their hands.

5. **Read picture books** about potty training together. There are some available in the ERIC shop.

6. **Show that you do wees and poos too!** Leave the toilet door open and ask family members to do the same. Young children learn by watching and copying.

7. **Talk to your health visitor** or children's centre for potty training advice.

Top 10 potty training tips

Top 10 potty training tips for successful toileting:

1. **Drink plenty:** Make sure your child is having 6-8 drinks of water-based fluid a day to help keep their bowel and bladder healthy. Avoid fizzy drinks, drinks with caffeine in them and sugary drinks. Don't limit their drinks to help them stay dry as it doesn't work. The bladder needs to be filled and emptied properly to keep it working well.

2. **Check for constipation:** Your child should poo at least four times a week and the poo should be soft and easy to pass. If they're passing hard poos or going less often than this, they may be constipated. Leaking, runny poo can also be a sign of constipation. Look at our bowel problems section or download *ERIC's Guide to Children's Bowel Problems* for more information.

3. **Use easy clothing:** Clothes that are easy to pull up and down are the best; avoid fiddly zips and buttons. Choose clothes that are easy to wash and dry. It can help to practise getting dressed and undressed. Let your child choose their own pants and practise wearing them to get used to the feeling.

4. **Pick a potty:** Let your child choose a potty if you're going to use one. Keep it in the bathroom and let them practise sitting on it. You might want to have more than one potty to begin with. If you're using a children's toilet seat, let your child choose it and a foot stool to help support them when they're on the loo.

5. **Get into a routine:** Don't ask your child if they need a wee or a poo as they might not know what this is to begin with. Call it 'potty time' or 'toilet time' and go every couple of hours.

6. **Keep it short:** Don't let them sit for too long on the potty or toilet, two or three minutes is fine. Keep some toys handy to occupy them while they sit.

7. **Encourage boys to sit down to wee:** They might also need a poo and sitting down will help them to go. They may empty their bladder better sitting down too.

8. **Be consistent:** If your child is looked after by a relative or goes to nursery or a childminder make sure you let them know that you're starting potty training and the way you're planning to do it. It really helps if everyone who cares for your child is doing the same thing.

9. **Give lots of praise:** For each little step like sitting on the potty, washing hands and getting dressed. Rewards are a good incentive – make them small and instant, like a sticker.

10. **Be patient:** Potty training is a skill which may take some time to learn, so don't be surprised if there are lots of accidents to start with. You might decide your child isn't ready after all, in which case stop potty training and have another go in a few weeks.