



ADVICE FOR CARERS

# Continence promotion for children with learning difficulties

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As children with learning difficulties can differ greatly in their development, it is difficult to say precisely at what age formal toilet training should start.

It is important however that steps are taken early on to ensure your child has all the physical skills in place to be able to cope with a more formal toilet training programme.



# Becoming toilet trained

Achieving the skill of being toilet trained is the result of the interaction of two processes:

- 1. Social maturity of the child. They are aware of rules, wish to please and be like their peers and don't like to be seen to be different.**
- 2. Maturation of the nervous system and normal bladder and bowel development.**

For children with learning difficulties quite clearly it is social maturity that many children struggle with to become toilet trained.

That does not mean that children with learning difficulties cannot be toilet trained. It means that they have to be taught in a different way.

Most children learn new skills by copying and wanting to please. Often very little formal training needs to take place. For many children with learning difficulties this may not happen. They need to be taught new skills, such as toilet training, in a more structured way.

***Do not presume all wetting and soiling problems are due to your child having a learning difficulty - always seek advice from your doctor or nurse if you have any concerns.***

*Further information regarding toileting aids/appliances and products can be obtained from PromoCon.*

## What skills are needed

### **1. The ability to sit on a potty/toilet**

When your child is in their 2nd year (or before in some cases) start to sit them on the potty at regular times e.g. after breakfast for a minute or so without expecting them to 'perform', gradually increasing the length and number of times so eventually they will happily sit on the potty at any time.

If you feel your child may struggle to sit on a normal potty or toilet, then ask to speak to the occupational therapist for advice on toileting aids and adaptations.

### **2. A bladder that will hold on to wee for at least an hour**

You can check how often your child wees by putting a liner in their nappy (e.g. folded non-disintegrating kitchen paper) and check it every hour. Record on a chart if they are wet or dry. Replace the paper every time they are wet/soiled.

### **3. A bowel that is not constipated**

Some children are prone to develop constipation, particularly if they are faddy eaters or don't drink a lot. By the age of 2yrs most children should open their bowels anything between 3 times per day to at least 3 times per week and no longer poo at night. If your child is doing anything different than above then you should seek further advice from your health visitor.

#### 4. Some awareness of being wet

Modern disposable nappies 'lock away' urine, to keep the skin dry, so that children never feel wet after doing a wee. Feeling wet is part of the learning process of becoming toilet trained, which does not happen if the child is kept in disposable nappies all the time.

If it is not practical to either remove the nappy completely or switch to washable nappies, then putting cotton pants on the child with the nappy on top could be tried. Keeping a folded piece of non-disintegrating kitchen paper in the nappy can also be used. This will help them to feel wet after they have done a wee.

#### 5. Some awareness of what toilet training is all about!

Every time you change your child's nappy talk about wees and poos in a positive way e.g. "good girl you've done a poo". Some parents have found using signs or pictures helpful for children with language delay.

## When to start formal potty training

Formal potty/toilet training should start once your child has all the 'physical' skills they would need in order to become toilet trained, regardless of their age.

That is:

- **Your child is happy to sit on the potty or toilet for at least 2 minutes (otherwise the training process will turn into a battle!)**
- **A mature bladder that can hold on to wee for about an hour or more (any less and you will be constantly sitting them on a potty!) Most children wee between 5-8 times per day. Check with your Health Visitor if you have any concerns.**
- **A mature bowel that is emptying regularly and completely (any constipation needs to be resolved first).**
- **Keep a record when your child wees and poos for a few weeks prior to starting the programme.**
- **Start the process by taking your child to the potty every hour or so. Target the times suggested by your previous record and adjust as necessary. Give plenty of praise for success.**

## Aids and products

### Washable absorbent 'trainer' pants

Once you start the formal training process and your child has some success, it is best to remove the nappy as soon as possible. Washable absorbent pants are an alternative, they can be used with a 'booster' disposable pad if necessary.

### Wetting alarms

These are small sensors placed in the nappy or pants that ring or 'speak' as soon as the child wets.

### Musical potties

These give the child an instant reward!

# National organisations available for information

## **PromoCon**

*Offers impartial, unbiased information about continence products and services. Managed and led by Disabled Living, Manchester.*

Redbank House,  
St Chad's Street, Cheetham,  
Manchester M8 8QA

Telephone: **0161 834 2001**

[www.promocon2001.co.uk](http://www.promocon2001.co.uk)

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## **ERIC (Enuresis Resource & Information Centre)**

*A national organisation for childhood bedwetting, daytime wetting and soiling issues for children, parents and professionals.*

34 Old School House,  
Britannia Road, Kingswood, Bristol  
BS15 8DB

Telephone: **0117 960 3060**

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)

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## **The Down's Syndrome Association**

*Offers information, support and advice to people with Down's syndrome, their families, carers and interested professionals.*

155 Mitcham Road,  
London SW17 9PG

Telephone: **020 8682 4001**

[www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk)

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## **The National Autistic Society**

*Provides services for people with autistic spectrum disorders. Information, support and advice are available on our Autism Helpline. Monday - Friday 10am - 4pm.*

393 City Road,  
London EC1V 1NG.

Telephone: **0870 600 8585**

[www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

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## **Mencap**

*Works with people with a learning disability and their families and carers - campaigning for equal rights and greater opportunities, and challenging attitudes and prejudices.*

123 Golden Lane,  
London EC1Y 0RT

Telephone:

England **020 7454 0454**

Wales **0808 8000 300**

N. Ireland **0845 7636 227**

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

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## **Contact a Family**

*Supporting families with disabled children including rare disorders.*

209 - 211 City Road,  
London EC1V 1JN

Telephone: **0808 808 3555**

[www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

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## **The Disabled Living Centres Council**

*A UK network of over 50 disabled living centres providing impartial advice and information from people with expert knowledge of products and services.*

Redbank House,  
St Chad's Street, Cheetham,  
Manchester M8 8QA

Telephone: **0161 834 1044**

[www.dlcc.org.uk](http://www.dlcc.org.uk)

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