



# • tips for toilet training your visually impaired child

Toilet training your toddler can strike fear into the hearts of most parents so how does it work if your child is visually impaired? Most of the general guidelines apply to both sighted and visually impaired children but there are just some extra considerations to think about if your child is blind or has low vision.

# • when should I start?

Children need to be physically and emotionally ready to use the toilet. All children are different, but, depending on their needs, most experts suggest that somewhere between the ages of 2 and just a little after the 3rd birthday is the optimum time. Timing is everything. Start too early and the process will take much longer. Try to avoid stressful times, for example the birth of a new sibling or starting at nursery. If you start to toilet train your child and it is proving unsuccessful, stop and try again in a month or so. Relax and take it easy. Your child will learn to use the toilet even if it takes a while. Prepare for good and bad days, don't rush or pressure your child – it will happen when they are ready!

# • how will I know when my child is ready?

Knowing when your child is ready to start toilet training is tricky but there are some tell tale signs to look out for:

- Your child may tell you when their nappy is dirty.
- Your child may tell you just before or just as they are having a wee or a poo.
- Their nappy stays dry for around 2 hours at a time during the day.
- Your child may start to show an interest in the toilet and underwear.
- Your child may want their nappy off because it feels uncomfortable.
- Your child may start to show signs of wanting to be more independent, wanting to do things without help.
- Your child is able to pull pants up and down.



# • how should I prepare my child for toilet training?

When toilet training your toddler you can either use a free standing potty or a seat that clips on to the toilet. There is no right or wrong way. A potty in the lounge may feel more convenient but with a visually impaired child it makes sense to get them started on the toilet straight away for consistency. The toilet is always in the same place unlike a potty that could be moved and leave your child unable to locate it independently.

If you are going to use a training seat on the toilet, it is important that your child feels secure. Visually impaired children can sometimes have a fear of falling or being 'left in space.' Placing a box or a step beside the toilet for them to rest their feet on will help with the feeling of being grounded.

A visually impaired child may be unsure how a toilet works. If you are comfortable, take your child in to the toilet with you when you need to go. Explain what you are doing and how the toilet works in simple words. When the toilet is clean and not in use, let your child feel the different parts, touch the water in the bottom, practise flushing. Warn of the noise of the flush beforehand so they are not startled.

Practise washing hands. If your child has low vision choose a soap dish or dispenser that contrasts with the sink and the wall tiles. Always keep the soap and the towel in the same place so they can be easily located.

There are lots of picture books on the market about potty training. Read the books to your child. Even if they can't see the pictures they will enjoy

listening to stories about children doing the same as them.

Involve your child in the buying of lots of new underwear. Let them choose the colour or the characters printed on them.

Ensure your child has plenty of clothes that are easy to get up and down. Elasticated waists are much better than buttons or zips. Many parents find that the summer months are better as the weather is warmer and children are wearing less clothes.

Using a hand over hand or hand under hand technique, practise pulling pants and underwear up and down so they become independent at doing it alone.

Choose a time to start when you can devote all your time to toilet training for a week or so. It may take much longer than this but you will want to give it all your attention in the beginning.





## • making a start

Now is the time to put your 'patient' face on! Take it easy and don't push. If your child senses that you are stressed and anxious, it may make your child feel pressured, which in turn can lead to resistance.

- When it is time to sit your child on the toilet, don't ask 'do you want to go to the toilet?', just guide them there and sit them on it.
- Sit until either they go or if not, for a few minutes.
- Practise washing and drying hands.
- At regular intervals take them back to the toilet and repeat the process. You want your child relaxed enough to be able to go, so ensure they are feeling safe and secure with something to rest their feet on. It may be useful to have a box of books that you can look at or read to them or maybe sing to pass the time.
- Ensure your child drinks lots of fluids.
- If your child has an accident, don't get upset. Simply clean it up and get on with your day.
- Give your child lots of praise.
- Still put a nappy on your child at night. Focus on getting them trained in the day first and night time will usually follow.

# • boys – to sit or stand?

Parents often ask whether their visually impaired boy should sit or stand to have a wee. If boys want to stand, they need to be able to get themselves in the right position by placing themselves against the rim. You or your partner can provide physical guidance by standing behind them hand on hand. They will be able to hear if they are successful. If your boy has no useful vision it may be easier for them to sit down. This question raises it's head for boys and men alike. Henshaws have written a blog and video about this very topic!

<https://www.henshaws.org.uk/do-blind-men-sit-down-to-pee/>

Toilet training can take a couple of weeks, a couple of months or longer depending on the child. The important thing to remember is that it is not a race and your child will get there in the end. Stay relaxed, positive and try to enjoy the experience!



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