

# ERIC's Guide for Children with Additional Needs



Hi, we're

**WEE & POO**

You can read all about  
us on the ERIC website  
[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)



This leaflet is for when toilet training is not so straight forward,  
and for those children for whom it is unlikely to be possible

## The main message...

...for parents is just because your child has a physical or learning disability, it does not necessarily mean they can't be toilet trained – don't assume they will be a lifelong nappy wearer. Nearly all children can learn to be clean and dry – it will be hard work for them and even harder work for you, but it will definitely be worth it in the end!

But don't wait for them to give some sign of readiness – some children never will, but that doesn't mean they won't be able to do it.

It's often tempting to wait until they are older as there may be lots of other challenges to deal with when they are younger; managing their mobility/behaviour may feel like enough! But the longer they continue to wear their 'portable toilet' (that's what a nappy is after all...) the harder it will be to introduce a new place to wee and poo, so look for the right time, and take action.

## The right time


For the majority of children with a mild to moderate learning disability the best advice is simply to treat them as you would any other child.

Read **ERIC's Guide to Potty Training** and pay particular attention to the 'How do you know when to start' and 'Getting Ready' pages. Make sure you've got everything as well prepared as possible before trying pants, especially sorting out any constipation and making sure your child is drinking plenty of fluids.




Knowing when the right time is does not have to be guess work though – you can complete a **Bladder/Bowel Assessment Chart**

This is a simple tool to help you work out exactly when your child wees and poos... and to help you spot anything else that needs attention and promote a healthy bladder and bowels.



**IMPORTANT!** Whatever level of continence your child is going to achieve, promoting a healthy bladder and bowels is vital. Untreated constipation can lead to frequent, loose bowel actions which can cause sore skin. A full bowel occupies the space the bladder needs, resulting in frequent, small wees and a big risk of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI).



**ALL children need to drink plenty of fluids, to avoid constipation, and should have their wees and poos monitored.**

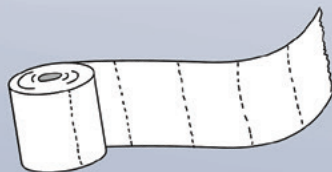
## Healthy bladder & bowels

The most important way to promote a healthy bladder and bowels is to ensure your child has plenty of fluids – a minimum of 6-8 drinks a day. If your child is tube fed talk to their dietician to check if they are getting enough water with their feeds.

It can be difficult to get children with additional needs to consume enough fluids – try different cups/bottles/straws as well as varying the drinks themselves. Also include foods with a high water content, like fruit, jelly, soup and fruit juice ice lollies.

Keep a close eye on bowel actions. Your child should pass soft poo at least four times a week, but not more than three times a day. If the stools are hard, or persistently loose, or if they are going more or less frequently, they could be constipated. Get more information on the ERIC website and/or read the leaflet ***ERIC's Guide to Children's Bowel Problems.***

Your child should be able to stay dry for an hour or two, depending on their age and their fluid intake. Weeing more frequently may be due to constipation, or a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI), or can be related to an inadequate fluid intake. There is lots more information on the ERIC website, and in the leaflet ***ERIC'S Guide to Children's Daytime Bladder Problems.***



## Learning to sit on the toilet

Make sure your bathroom is welcoming - you may need to make the toilet more child friendly to entice your child in!

Your child will need to be able to sit safely and comfortably, either on a potty or on a suitable children's toilet seat. Their feet need to be firmly supported on a step or box, with their feet flat and high enough so their knees are above their hips.

Depending on your child's mobility, posture and balance, they may need a specially adapted toilet seat or chair. An Occupational Therapist (OT) is the best person to advise on this. Before starting a toilet training programme, your child should practise sitting on the toilet every day – they may only manage a few seconds at first, but you will be able to gradually build on that until they can manage about 5 minutes.

Don't forget boys should be taught to sit down to wee as well as girls.

Resist the temptation to ask them if they need a wee or poo; simply say "It's toilet time". Reward them for sitting on the toilet, not for passing any wee or poo – that may be an unachievable goal at first. Aim for times you think they are most likely to do a wee or poo (see 'Planning a toilet training programme', overleaf) – if it happens that's an added bonus!

When sitting on the toilet has become familiar, and your child is happy to sit for a few minutes, they're ready to start a toilet training programme!



More information overleaf...



## Planning a toilet training programme

- First of all identify if there is any pattern to your child's bowel actions – if there is, use that to guide toileting times. Otherwise plan to sit your child on the toilet 20-30 minutes after meals/feeds (when they are most likely to poo) and before bed.
- Work out how often they do a wee – if it is every two hours, start by sitting them on the toilet every 1½ hours.
- Now you know what the best times for toileting are you can make a timetable, so everyone who looks after your child will know their toileting times. Build the timetable around existing routines.
- Choose clothes that are easy to pull up and down – avoid fiddly zips and buttons.
- Practise getting dressed and undressed.
- Choose clothes that are easy to wash and dry...accidents WILL happen.
- Choose pants with your child. Buy lots...they WILL have accidents. Practise wearing them for short periods to get used to the feeling.
- Work out your way of communicating that it is 'toilet time' – what words you will use for wee/poo/toilet etc., what symbols/pictures you will show to indicate it is time to go. You may find it helps to use an 'object of reference' to convey when it is bathroom time, such as a flannel.
- Gather some toys/activities for your child to play with while they sit on the toilet. Find something your child likes and keep it in the bathroom just for toilet sits.
- Decide on your reward system, remembering you should reward achievable goals such as sitting on the toilet, washing hands, helping to get dressed. Rewards need to be instant, so your child connects the reward with what they have just done.
- BE BRAVE! You're going to need a lot of determination and patience.
- When everything is in place.....GO FOR IT!

## Children who will only poo in a nappy

Some children do really well with weeing in the potty or toilet but refuse to poo. Read the information sheet *Children who will only poo in a nappy and other toilet avoiders*

## Able to stay dry but can't get to the toilet quick enough?

If your child has mobility problems they may find it difficult to transfer onto the toilet in time. Try to anticipate when they will need to go rather than waiting for signals.

You may find something like a portable urinal useful, so they can wee sitting in a wheelchair or other seat. Look on the ERIC website at [Useful-products-for-promoting-continence](#)

## Especially for boys

If you know when your son will do a poo, either into the toilet or at a regular time into a pad, he may be able to use a device to contain his wee instead of a nappy style product. This could be a sheath or pants with a built-in drainage system – there are various products available on prescription from your GP. Look on the ERIC website at [Useful-products-for-promoting-continence](#)

It may be appropriate to use a bowel intervention to promote a predictable bowel emptying - read the leaflet *ERIC's Guide for Children Living with Complex Bladder and Bowel Problems* for information.

A sheath or special pants could then be used to promote comfort and dignity.

## Sometimes it's not so straightforward...

For some children toilet training requires a lot more assessment and planning, and endless patience and perseverance!

The *Flowchart – Children with Additional Needs* on the ERIC website will guide you step by step on your journey towards continence. Ask your child's nurse for advice and support along the way.

Start off by completing a really thorough *Bladder/Bowel Assessment Chart*

The information this provides will

1. Help you to spot anything that needs attention
2. Identify any pattern to your child's bowel actions
3. Measure the gap between your child's wees

Now use this information to complete a *Toilet Readiness Assessment*

This will help you decide if the time is right to start a toilet training programme. If your child is not ready, or if there is no success the first time you try, continue to work on a healthy bladder and bowels and repeat the assessment in three months' time.

*N.B. If the assessment identifies ongoing problems, discuss with your nurse or doctor.*

*For some children though, toilet training is unlikely to be possible, and the priority then is containing the wee and/or poo in the most comfortable and effective way possible.*

## It doesn't have to be a nappy!

Disposable containment products come in all shapes and sizes, but fall into three main categories:

- Nappies
- Disposable pant-style products, usually known as pull-ups
- Shaped pads – held in place by special stretchy pants or by normal underwear

There is also a range of washable pants and pads available.

### Choosing the right product

Once your child grows out of children's nappies, a two piece system – pad in pants – is likely to be the best option. If your child is mobile and you want to promote their independence you may favour pull-ups. But it is worth considering a two piece system with a shaped pad – you might find this is more absorbent. Special stretchy pants may hold them in place more securely than normal underwear – look on the ERIC website for [Useful-products-for-promoting-continence](#) for ideas. Wearing a pad in pants makes changing MUCH easier too – your child will need to undress to change pull-ups, but not pads! Also, some children find pull-ups confusing – are they a nappy? Or pants you can wee or poo into?

### Is your child eligible for NHS products?

There are nationally recognised guidelines determining children's eligibility for products and the process for supplying them. Your local continence service will also have its own criteria. Look at the *Flowchart – Children with Additional Needs* on the ERIC website for information.

### Getting the most out of your products

Look at the information sheet *Advice for parents/carers using disposable containment products* for tips on storage, fitting, use of creams etc. Most leaks can be avoided if you know the best ways to use the products.

## Extra layers...

Sometimes even the most absorbent pads, used in exactly the right way, can leak. Protect seats, mattresses, duvets and pillows with waterproof covers and use washable, absorbent sheets/seat covers to soak up any leakage.

Look in the Bedding Protection section of [ERIC's online shop](#)





For information and support on bedwetting, daytime wetting, constipation and soiling and potty training call ERIC's free Helpline on **0808 169 9949** or visit [eric.co.uk/helpline](http://eric.co.uk/helpline)

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

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Also in this series of leaflets:



If your child is of school age, they may well need support during the school day.  
To find out more see [Help at school on the ERIC Website](#)

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