

Understanding toilet refusal in children

The child that will only use a nappy - A guide for parents and carers

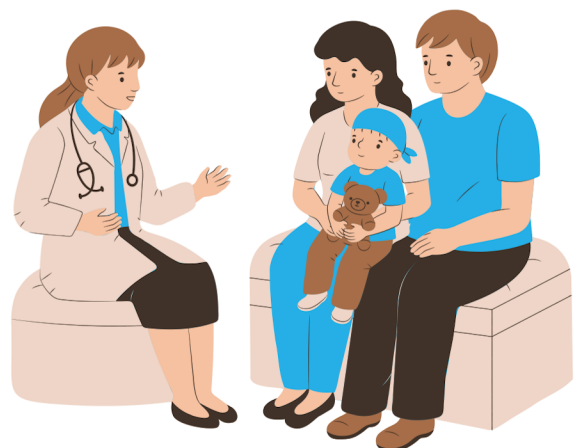
Introduction

Some children are reluctant to pass urine (wee) or open their bowels (poo) on the potty or toilet. Others will pass urine happily but will not open their bowels when there. The reasons for this are not clear. However, this is a very common issue among young children.

It may be that they are reluctant to give up the last bits of babyhood, they may be worried about wee splashing, the feeling of poo falling away into the potty, or there may be other problems such as constipation.

Usually there are no underlying issues and it is just down to your child preferring to carry on using the nappy as they always have. Your child's health visitor may have suggestions that help your child learn to use the potty.

Your child's health care professional can also make sure that they do not have constipation or any another issue that might be causing the problem. If your child is constipated this will need to be treated. There is more information about treating constipation in children in the Bladder & Bowel UK information library on the website.



Understanding toilet refusal in children

What will happen if I stop letting my child use a nappy?

Children can hold on to their wee and poo for a long time. This can cause problems, if they are refusing to use the potty or toilet. For example, holding onto urine may increase the risk of urinary tract infections, while holding onto poo can eventually cause constipation.

What can I do to help my child learn to use the potty or toilet?

To learn to use the potty or toilet it may be that your child needs to feel in control. Therefore, a programme that makes gradual changes often works well:

- Allow your child to have a nappy on when you think they are ready to pass urine (about every two to three hours) or to open their bowels
- Take your child to the bathroom to put the nappy on and then stay there with them while the nappy is on or leave them there with a favourite book or toy, until they have done their poo
- If your child is reluctant to stay in the bathroom with the nappy on let them leave, but take them back to the bathroom as soon as you think they have used the nappy and take it off, clean and get them dressed again in the bathroom. Gradually increase the time that they are in the bathroom with the nappy on, using distraction, until they are in the bathroom the whole time the nappy is on
- Remove the nappy as soon as your child has done a wee or a poo and encourage them to help empty any poo into the toilet
- Your child should then flush the toilet and wash and dry their hands (if your child is frightened of the flush, do not flush the toilet while they are in the bathroom)



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- If your child can stand up, it is important that they are standing up when the nappy is put on and taken off. This allows them to help with the process. It also lets them start to learn about and help with bottom wiping, which they cannot do if they are lying down. It also makes it easier to put the nappy on when you are out and about
- Once your child is in a routine of going to the bathroom to have the nappy put on and staying there with it on, the programme is moved forward. This is done by encouraging your child to sit on the toilet or potty with the nappy on. You may need to start with them sitting for just a few seconds
- Gradually encourage your child to sit on the toilet or potty for more time, until they are sitting the whole time the nappy is on. You may need to use distraction with books, songs, games or a toy to help them learn to sit on the toilet or potty
- Stickers or other small rewards can be used to encourage your child

When your child is happily sitting on the toilet with a nappy on to wee and/or poo, you can start to work towards them weeing and/or pooing without a nappy. Different children respond well to different ways of approaching this. One of the following may work for you: Put the opened out nappy over the potty, or under the toilet seat so your child can still feel it is there

- Over time gradually lower the nappy, so it is not touching their bottom. Eventually you should be able to stop using the nappy. Some children do well if the nappy is replaced with toilet paper
- Use nappies that are smaller and smaller sizes until you can tell your child that, as they have grown and there are no longer any nappies that fit them, they need to start passing urine and opening their bowels on the toilet or potty without the nappy. You may tell them they are a 'big' boy/girl now
- Put the nappy on, but do not do it up. Eventually you can replace it with some kitchen roll and then toilet paper. Gradually reduce the amount of toilet paper until you are only using a couple of sheets, before being removing it completely
- Cut a small hole in the nappy. Gradually increase the size of the hole until your child is passing urine and opening their bowels through the hole

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It is important to avoid battles and to have a clear consistent approach using lots of praise and encouragement for successes and avoid giving them attention or interaction for negative behaviour. Having goals that everyone works towards, and that change as your child makes progress is often helpful.

My child has additional needs – will this work for them?

This approach will work well for children with additional needs. However, for some children with sensory issues or processing difficulties, they may take longer to learn to use the potty or toilet. If your child has these issues, they may require very gradual changes over a longer period of time. Ask their healthcare professional for help and support.

Try making the bathroom a place that your child enjoys being in. You could try putting some pictures they like on the walls, having some decorations they enjoy, or have a few toys that are kept in the bathroom and that they are only allowed while in there. Encourage sitting on the potty or toilet as a seat when they are getting dressed after a bath or shower.

You also may need to think about other things that might be making them reluctant to use the potty or toilet. Some children struggle with the bathroom environment due to their sensory needs. Their occupational therapist may be able to make suggestions to help with this. Their doctor or nurse may be able to refer them to an occupational therapist, if they do not have one.

There is also more information about toilet training children with additional needs and sensory issues, in the Bladder & Bowel UK paediatric information library.

Understanding toilet refusal

Find more information about child bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](tel:01612144591) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.
