

Successful Potty and Toilet Training with Multiples

Potty training two or more toddlers isn't usually as difficult as parents expect it to be and in most cases will soon become a distant memory. However, it can still be quite challenging and messy as it is hard to keep an eye on more than one child at a time. Starting when each child is ready, and staying relaxed about any 'accidents', should mean nappy changing will soon become a thing of the past.

WHAT IS POTTY TRAINING?

Potty training is teaching your toddler to gain control of their bladder and bowel movements.

Toddlers are usually taught to use a potty first because it is easier for them to use than a toilet. However there are a variety of products on the market now, for example, steps and children's toilet seats that can be used instead of, or as well as, the potty.

Potty training is part of the transition of helping your children develop the ability to manage their toilet hygiene independently.



WHAT DOES POTTY TRAINING INVOLVE?

Toddlers in nappies are used to weeing and pooing whenever they feel the need to do so.

Potty training involves a child learning to recognise the 'feeling' of needing to go to the toilet, communicating



this feeling, controlling their bladder and bowel movements until they can get to a potty or toilet and, at a later stage, managing to remove their own clothes and pants.

It is not surprising therefore that many children can have difficulty with the potty training process.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL POTTY TRAINING

- Only start toilet training when an individual child is ready.
- This may be at different times for each multiple.
- It is easier to start potty training in warm weather because there's less clothing to pull up and down and it is easier to get washing dry.
- Choose the potty with your child, so they feel happy with it and in control of the situation.
- Some families may prefer to bypass using a potty and move straight to using the toilet. You can buy toilet inserts (that fit directly onto the

toilet) and toilet steps.

- With more than one child it is a good idea to buy more than one potty, so each child chooses their favourite, and they are treated as individuals in the potty training process.
- Keep your children's clothing simple and easy to remove, or let them just wear underwear. Some families find simply being bare bottomed at home works for them.
- Give lots of praise at every attempt to use the potty and use reward systems to encourage them.

Potty training should only begin when a child is ready. There can be a gap of months between children's readiness, even with identical twins or triplets.

- Give a small, instant reward to a child when they do a wee or poo, remembering to praise the other child or children for what they achieve as well, which may be nothing to do with potty training.
- Try to remain calm even if there is a mess. Your child will quickly pick up on your anxiety or frustration.
- Try to ensure that using the potty is a

positive experience. Don't let it become associated with a negative vibe.

- Try to avoid starting when there is something else significant going on in the child's life, e.g. starting a new nursery, moving house or the arrival of a new baby.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT AGE TO INITIATE POTTY TRAINING?

Children develop at different rates and potty training should only begin when a child is ready.

There can be a gap of months between children's readiness even with identical twins or triplets. Children also vary in the order they develop; some have bladder control before bowel control, and vice versa.



Most children are ready for potty training at some time between 18 months and three years of age. Most parents start the training when their children are between two and three years old.

A toddler's nervous system has to have developed enough to control the muscles involved. Babies born prematurely may experience a delay in this development and therefore will not be ready to start potty training as early as full term babies.

By the age of three the majority of children are able to control their bladder and bowels during the day. Becoming dry at night may happen at the same time, but some children take longer to become dry at night.

Most parents begin potty training when their children are 2-3 years old.



HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN MY CHILDREN ARE READY?

It is important not to rush your children into potty training merely because of their age, because friends' children are trained, or because the nursery or nanny says the child should be trained by now. These pressures will only lead to problems later, so try not to feel pressured by others. However, there are a number of signs you can look out for which indicate readiness:

- Your child understands and uses the family term for filling their nappy, e.g. wee or poo.
- They have a regular time each day to poo. This will help you know good times to sit them on the potty or toilet.
- They hold themselves when they need to go to the toilet.
- They are dry for two or more hours at a time. This is an indicator that they may be getting ready for potty training.
- Tugging at their nappy when it is wet or dirty.
- Fussing for a clean nappy immediately after filling it.
- They start going off by themselves for privacy when filling their nappy.

GETTING STARTED

When you see these signs, start teaching them what a potty or toilet is.

Familiarity with toileting should be started well before they show signs of being 'ready'. For example, letting them join you in the loo and having a potty they can put their teddies on.

Encourage the children to sit on the potty or toilet at certain times during the daily routine to get them used to it. For example, before a bath or following a nappy change.

It is also a good idea to encourage the children to sit on the potty or toilet at certain times during the daily routine to get them used to it. For example before a bath, following a nappy change, 20-30 minutes after every meal or when they first wake up.

Explain to your toddler that the potty is his or her own toilet and keep it within easy reach. You may like to have a potty downstairs if your bathroom is upstairs, but place potties in bathrooms whenever possible so they learn that the bathroom is the place to toilet.

Over the next week or so help your child become comfortable with the potty, for example, by letting them sit on it without their nappy while watching television or looking at a book, or perhaps while you tell them a story.



Whilst you want your child to be completely comfortable with the potty, you can remind your toddler what the potty is for or they may just get used to it being another chair. Avoid letting them sit for too long (we suggest a minute for each year of their lives).

Plan ahead what outings you are going to go on for the first few days. You need to take a consistent approach wherever you are so speak to your children's nursery and grandparents etc if they are going to be looking after them.

NEXT STEPS

There are two main methods, but either way needs enough potties and lots of attentiveness. Children can **either**:

- Sit on their potties for a few minutes at a time (no longer than five minutes). At this stage youngsters know what toilets and potties are for, so all that needs to be done is to wait until they get bored or produce something. Bowels often move 20-30 minutes after eating, so this is a good time.
- Remove nappies altogether during the day and put the child in washable pants with pad or use a liner e.g. 'Dry Like Me'.

Choosing their own pants can be a great motivator, especially if with their own favourite colour or character. The use of a reward system for successfully using the potty, such as a star chart or pasta in a jar, may also be something that could motivate the toddler in the early days.

Remember to reward all the steps



along the way and set achievable goals such as drinking well. Avoid rewarding for clean pants as it can be very demotivating when they do have an accident.

There will be inevitable accidents, but the day of success will come! If only one toddler gets the idea to begin with, do not worry; multiples are great imitators and the second child may follow suit or they may not be ready yet.

When he or she has become accustomed to using the potty regularly, you should start to teach them to wipe their own bottom from front to back and wash their hands.

Children can start to use the toilet at the same time as starting to use the potty as long as the child is not anxious or worried about it.

It's really important to make sure little boys sit down to wee as it helps to avoid future problems with constipation.

WHEN SHOULD WE SEE A DOCTOR?

Patience, understanding and a lot of positive reinforcement can deal with most difficulties with potty training. However, if your child is over the age of three and has been trying to use the potty without much success, you should arrange to see your doctor, with your child, to exclude possible medical causes and get further advice.

Keep a diary of their pooing pattern, are they drinking enough and could they be constipated?

Your doctor will be able to rule out any underlying medical causes and may recommend laxatives if your child is constipated.

WHAT SUPPORT DOES TAMBA OFFER?

Tamba aims to provide high quality information and mutual support networks for families of twins, triplets and more, highlighting their unique needs to all involved in their care.

We have Twinline, a confidential helpline for parent to parent support. Call 0800 138 0509 between 10am-1pm and 7pm-10pm daily or email asktwinline@tamba.org.uk.

We have a number of parent support groups for special needs, one parent families, triplets plus, grandparents and bereavement. We also provide specialist education, speech therapy, educational psychology and family therapy support through our Honorary Consultants service. See www.tamba.org.uk for more details.

Thank you for downloading our factsheet. Feedback from our user community is very important to Tamba. Please complete this survey to help us continue to ensure we meet the needs of our community: www.surveymonkey.com/r/supportresources

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.eric.org.uk/poo-and-wee

www.familylives.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/potty-training-tips

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/potty-training-problems

If your multiples child has disabilities you may find Scope's advice useful:

www.scope.org.uk/support/families/toilet-training

Please speak to your health visitor if you are having difficulties potty training your multiples or have any queries.

PUBLICATIONS

Twins and Multiple Births - The Essential Parenting Guide from Pregnancy to Adulthood, by Carol Cooper is available from www.tamba.org.uk.

You can download the following publications from www.eric.org.uk :

[ERIC's guide to potty training](#)

[ERIC's guide to bowel problems](#)

[ERIC's guide for children with additional needs](#)

ERIC'S BOWEL AND BLADDER HELPLINE

www.eric.org.uk/helpline

0845 370 8008 Calls cost 9.6p per minute plus the phone company's access charge. Lines are open Monday to Thursday 10am to 2pm. Or you can email helpline@eric.org.uk



The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity

