



Children's Toileting Habits



Advice for parents



The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity

If you have concerns, we recommend accessing the resources available on the Eric website. www.eric.org.uk

Many children struggle with toilet training, daytime and night-time wetting, soiling, constipation and withholding and there is lots of help available.

1 in 7 children aged 4 ½

1 in 20 aged 9 ½

experience daytime wetting.

1 in 15 7 years olds

1 in 75 teenagers experience bedwetting.

Day and night wetting

Daytime wetting is a normal part of a child's development and nothing to be ashamed about. It is important to remember that this isn't something your child will be doing on purpose, they too will be feeling anxious and worried about it but may show these feelings in different ways.

It is important to get to the bottom of why a child may be wetting in the day. Often **constipation** can be a factor; the bowel is too full and there is little room for the bladder to hold much urine.

A **Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)** could also be a cause. Children may comment that it hurts to wee, or they are weeing more frequently. It is always worth a visit to the doctor to have a urine check.

Muscle weakness could be a cause for an overactive bladder. Drinking frequently throughout the day will provide good exercise for the bladder muscles.

As with daytime wetting, factors such as **constipation**, **UTIs** and **weak muscles** can cause children to wet the bed at night. Eric advises removing pull-ups if you can, even if they are still wet at night. Children will be receiving a subconscious message that they have protection so don't need to wake up.

Bed wetting alarms can also be useful to start teaching children to recognise the messages from the bladder in the night.

Try to resist the temptation to lift your child out of bed to have a wee whilst still asleep, this encourages your child to wee in their sleep.



Access practical advice on how to support your child on the Eric website [Factsheets & free downloads](#) | [ERIC](#)

Children who will only poo in a nappy

This is a common phase for lots of children, particularly once they have mastered potty training.

If they insist on using a nappy, don't say no, this could lead to constipation if they then withhold from going.

How often should they poo?

Eric advises on average a healthy routine is approximately 4 times a week. If a child is pooing too much (3 times a day or more) this could indicate diarrhoea or an overflow from constipation.



Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

A global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a regression in child development ranging from separation anxiety, increased emotional outbursts and an increase in toileting concerns reported by parents.

UNICEF has published a number of articles about parental concern over child regression as a result of the pandemic which can be accessed via <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/regression-and-covid>.

The Anna Freud Centre have also been carrying out research into this area publishing an article in 2021 reporting their findings of the impact in nurseries in the UK and is well worth a read.

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/13013/their-challenges-are-our-challenges-survey-report.pdf>

The general message from these articles is that you are not on your own and many families are in the same boat. If you are concerned, please do talk to us and we will do all we can to support you.

General tips and advice



Children are sometimes scared of the toilet itself. Spend time reassuring them that they are safe. Practice together flushing a sheet of toilet paper and talking about where it goes and how small the pipes are, far too small for them to fit through! You could try making a game of this by adding drops of food colouring to the water in the cistern and guessing what colour it will be when the toilet flushes.



Practice sitting on the toilet, fully clothed, for a few seconds each day. This will support your child in being able to relax whilst sitting, an optimum position to get things moving.



Children experiencing problems with weeing and pooing may not be able to read the signals that they need to go before it is too late. Understanding their needs is key to success. If a child is wetting, Eric's advice is to sit them on the toilet every 2 hours. If they are struggling to poo, sitting on the toilet 20-30 minutes after eating is a good time. Eric also encourages items such as toys or books as a distraction to encourage sitting and relaxing for a longer period of time. The ideal is sitting for 5-10 minutes.



Once you are satisfied that your child is not constipated you can move on to identifying where they like to poo when wearing a nappy e.g. under a table, hidden in a corner etc. You can then start supporting them to get closer to the toilet each time. This will need a great deal of patience.

Language

Children react to the way adults talk and respond to them. It is easy to show that you are exasperated when they have a toileting accident, we understand how frustrating the journey (and washing!) can be for parents. However, by focusing on the positives, your child will become more confident, and their self-esteem will grow. We will support you and your child through this journey and if we do need to discuss anything with you in front of your child we will do so respectfully and without shaming.

We find these phrases help:

Thank you for trying

Well done, you were able to sit on the toilet for a bit longer today

Well done for telling me you're wet

Rewards

This is a long process, and children can become demoralised when things don't go to plan or they feel out of control. By setting small, achievable goals together such as drinking a certain amount throughout the day, remaining dry for a few days and rewarding these with verbal praise will boost their confidence and provide more incentive to achieve. You can always work up to longer term goals later.

Access Eric's drinking and toileting reward charts here <https://www.eric.org.uk/factsheets>