

# ERIC - The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity

## CHILDREN WHO WILL ONLY POO IN A NAPPY AND OTHER TOILET AVOIDERS



Children who will only poo in a nappy are completely normal. Lots of children go through a phase, usually soon after potty training has begun, when they refuse to poo in the potty or toilet and insist on using a nappy. Other children go through a phase of refusing to wee in the potty or toilet. You'll find the information and techniques below will be relevant to them too. Some boys and girls will work it out for themselves, but without intervention some would happily poo in a nappy for years.

**Here are some tips to help you break the pooing in a nappy habit.**

If your child insists on using a nappy to poo, **DON'T SAY NO**, or they will simply try to avoid pooing. Withholding the stools will lead to constipation – which is definitely something to avoid! Let them have the nappy on just to do their poo, and work on gradually changing their behaviour.

So, where do you start?

### **Constipation**

Constipation often plays a part in potty/toilet avoidance. A big, hard, painful poo will scare the child, and to stop it happening again they simply hold on. Look at ERIC's Guide to Children's Bowel Problems for information on how to recognise if your child is constipated. There is also lots more information on the Flowchart for Constipation. Make sure any constipation is really well managed before attempting to change toileting behaviour.

### **Making the toilet less scary**

Some children are frightened of the toilet itself. This fear will need to be overcome before they can start learning to sit on it. If your child is scared of the flush, start by flushing it while they stand by the bathroom door, then gradually ask them to come a little closer. When they are near enough, encourage them to put just a little bit of toilet paper in the toilet to flush away. If they are worried about the water splashing back when they use the toilet, show them how to put a layer of toilet paper over the water in the toilet bowl. Create a game with a few bottles of food colouring! Add a few drops to the cistern, then ask your child to guess what colour the water in the toilet will change to when they flush.

## Learning to sit on the toilet

To start with, sitting on the potty/toilet should have nothing to do with pooing. The emphasis should be completely on relaxed, happy sitting – when you ask them to do so. To start with this may be a five second sit, once a day, fully clothed. That's fine! Reward them for sitting (have a look at our Toileting Reward Chart), and resist the temptation to mention wee or poo! The key now is moving forward gradually, so each little step forward is an achievable goal. You plan when the toilet/potty sitting should take place – aim for 20-30 minutes after each meal as that is the best time to poo, and before bed. Make sure your child's bottom and feet are firmly supported – see the section 'How to get the poo in the loo' in ERIC's Guide to Children's Bowel Problems. Over time you'll build up a regular toileting programme, with your child sitting on the potty/toilet for 5-10 minutes four times a day. Keep a bag of special toys in the bathroom ready so they look forward to exploring what's there whenever they sit on the loo. Remember to reward every potty/toilet sit with your agreed system.

## Next steps

Once you've made sure your child is not constipated, and they can happily sit on the potty/toilet for 5-10 minutes, you're ready to begin working towards them pooing in the right place. The key thing is to work out where they like to poo in their nappy, for example behind the sofa or in the corner of their bedroom, and where you want them to poo – on the potty/toilet. Put as many tiny steps as possible in between until eventually they reach the potty. Each step should be an achievable goal.

**Be patient** – this may take a long time, but it will be worth it! Read the examples below for ideas of how other parents encouraged their children to move step-by-step towards the potty.

**ERIC website** - [www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)  
**ERIC's Helpline** (0845 370 8008)



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## POTTY TRAINING FLOWCHART



## THE BRISTOL STOOL CHART FOR CHILDREN

### THE BRISTOL STOOL CHART FOR CHILDREN Choose your Poo



#### Type 1



Looks like: Rabbit Droppings  
Separate hard lumps. Like nuts (hard to pass)

#### Type 2



Looks like: Bunch of Grapes  
Sausage-shaped, but lumpy

#### Type 3



Looks like: Corn on the Cob  
Like a sausage but cracked on the surface

#### Type 4



Looks like: Sausage  
Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft.

#### Type 5



Looks like: Chicken Nuggets  
Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (passed easily)

#### Type 6



Looks like: Porridge  
Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool

#### Type 7



Looks like: Gravy  
Watery, no solid pieces ENTIRELY LIQUID

The most common bowel problem in children is constipation. Left untreated, or treated too gently, this can lead to soiling. Keep a check on your child's poo – it should be Type 4 - soft and easy to pass.

#### How often should a child poo?

At least 4 times a week. Any less than this and the journey from mouth to bottom is taking too long – too much water is then absorbed and hard poo results – look overleaf. MORE than 3 times a day is not right either – it could look like Type 7. That might be diarrhoea but it could also be overflow caused by constipation! Read on to find out more...

#### What age can constipation start?

ANY age! Even babies can get constipated! Including those who are breast fed! Never wait for it to get better by itself...the longer it is left untreated the longer it takes to get better.



Concept by Professor DCA Candy and Eileen Devaney, based on the Bristol Stool Form Scale produced by Dr K W Heaton, Reader in Medicine at the University of Bristol.  
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