

## **Preparing your child for their big school adventure**

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Starting school can be an exciting, yet daunting, time for children and their parents. There's so much to think about and get ready; school uniform, the school-run route, new friends to make, will they like the school dinners?

Many parents and carers may also be thinking about how their child is going to manage using the toilets. Here are a few tips to help parents and children feel prepared for this new challenge and some strategies for dealing with any potential issues before they become a problem...



### **Preparation and practice**

There are lots of things that your child will be expected to do when they start school – dress themselves after PE, use a knife and fork at lunchtime and, of course, use the toilet independently.

Encourage your child to be as independent with their wees and poos as possible at home so, hopefully, the transition to school-life is less overwhelming for them. Help them to feel confident wiping their bottom, flushing and washing their hands.

If their school has them, double check that your little boy knows what urinals are and how to use them!

### **Communication is key - ask questions!**

Check that the school do a tour of the toilets for the children early on so they know where to go.

Ask the school staff questions and visit the toilets yourself.

Are they near the classroom?

Will the children be allowed unrestricted access?

Will your child need a step to help them reach?

What's their policy if your child has an accident and needs help to get cleaned up (they shouldn't call you in to help with this). You may even spot that the flush is different from the one you have at home and perhaps you need to give them help using hand dryers; especially if they find the noise frightening.

### **Stick to a routine at home**

Try to keep a regular toileting routine in place built around the school day:

- Encourage your child to sit and try for a poo 20-30 minutes after their breakfast.
- Check if they need a wee or poo before leaving school at the end of the day. The walk or drive home can be a stressful experience for you and them especially if they've been withholding all day!
- Find out what the routine is when your son or daughter needs the toilet in class. Do they have to ask permission? Make sure they have the confidence to ask the teacher or supply teacher if they need the toilet.
- With you not there to remind them, your child may be so busy at school they forget to drink. Explain why having 6 - 8 drinks a day is so important to keep them healthy. Reward them when their water bottle comes home empty.

### **Starting school in nappies**

We know, that not all school-aged children will be out of nappies during the day. Some children might be comfortable using a potty, but haven't yet got the hang of 'the big toilet'. Toilet training can be a stressful time especially if school is looming. If it doesn't happen easily, it can create a lot of anxiety for parents and children.

Legally, schools aren't allowed to turn away children who haven't yet mastered potty training or are still in nappies. They have duty of care to your child and in an ideal world school staff and parents should work together to support children who need help getting reliably clean and dry.

## **Difficulties using the toilet?**

For some children their issues may be more complex – chronic constipation with overflow soiling, overactive bladders or recurrent urinary tract infections – and may require medication. If a child is on the autism spectrum there can be sensory issues affecting their ability to use the toilet. Children with a physical impairment might require adjustments to be made by the school to enable them to access and use the toilets.

## **Getting help**

The most important thing is to talk to the school staff, so they are aware and can help. The Children and Families Act 2014 places a statutory duty on schools to support pupils with medical conditions, including bladder and bowel problems. Schools have a responsibility to meet your child's needs.

## **Accidents happen!**

And finally, even for children who have been dry during the day for a long time and are confident using toilets, accidents at school still happen.

It's a busy and exciting time for children, they are learning new routines, getting used to new people and engaging in a round of constant activity – sometimes children will just forget to go! It's worth packing a bag of spare clothes, underwear and wipes that can be kept in school, just in case.

If you are having difficulties with your child's toileting habits- speak to a health professional- help is available.

Helpful websites - <https://www.eric.org.uk>

<https://www.bbuk.org.uk>