

# Our best-ever Parent 'Survivor' Guide to Toilet Training Children

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## Are you ready for the adventure of a lifetime?

Before commencing the game, the only crucial question you need to ask yourself is whether your child is really ready to play. The age of your child is not important! Toilet training is a developmental process unique to each child that cannot be rushed.

Don't board the aircraft unless your child can sit still for 3-5 minutes, follow simple instructions, stay dry for 1-1.5 hours at a time and is indicating some awareness of the sensation of wetness or soiling. If your child cannot do these things, parachute out now! The risk otherwise is that your child will not be a willing participant in the game and the promise of great rewards will be doomed.

## Survivor Tip 1

For you and your child to have a chance to succeed, toilet training needs to commence at a time in your child and family's life when things are relatively calm and settled.

Challenges like being marooned on a deserted island, moving house, changing jobs, illness, transitioning to preschool or big school are not recommended as a starting point for either of you.

Daytime dryness can be captured first. Night time dryness comes at a later stage. Warmer months are also recommended as a better time to start the training adventure, however you might have to begin preparations a few months earlier. A word of advice – if either you or your child becomes stressed or emotionally charged at any stage, take a break and resume the game at a later stage.

## Survivor Tip 2

Before you start to play, forward planning and discussion with all members of the tribe who care for your child is vital. Consistency of language and approach is necessary otherwise toilet training will just become a never-ending obstacle course for your child. You will need to ensure that your entire tribe is doing the same thing so that your child is clear about expectations.

Decisions need to be made regarding the following.

- Whether to place your child in nappies, pull-ups or underpants during the whole adventure. (It is easier for a child to sense wetness in undies.)
- Whether to start with bowel training or bladder training. (Starting with bladder training is usually easier).
- What clothing you will be putting your child in during the day – overalls, belts and difficult buttons to undo in a rush are discouraged.
- Whether you will be encouraging your child to undress independently or whether your child needs help to remove clothing.

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We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

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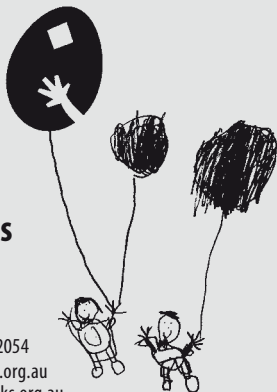
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**Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.**

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- Whether your child is going to use the potty or toilet.
- Whether your child needs help to access the potty or toilet.
- Whether your son is going to be encouraged to stand or sit to wee. (Unless a boy is already 'watering the garden' outside, teaching a boy to urinate by sitting can make subsequent bowel training easier.)
- What protection and supplies need to accompany the child including toilet inserts/steps, rewards and spare clothing?

### Survival Tip 3

Familiarisation with the environment is all-important in the count down to the big event, especially for anxious players.

Just spending time playing in the room where the toilet is located can be invaluable as a starting point. Some children might need to sit on a parent's lap (fully clothed) initially until their fears have abated sufficiently for them to be able to sit on the toilet alone (fully clothed).

Reading stories, having music on, playing with toys (especially dolls that can wee) can help a child feel less fearful. Watching role models use the toilet confidently is also helpful.

### Survival Tip 4

Prepare the environment for the challenge and buy the supplies before you start.

All children benefit from their feet touching the floor as stooing is aided when a child can push his or her feet against a solid surface such as a footstool or the floor. Children with balance difficulties need to feel secure when seated and might require a wall rail.

Form an alliance with your doctors and therapists and get advice on whether your child has any problem that prevents independence on the toilet or toilet training ie. do they need a wall rail for balance, a toilet insert or a footstool, visuals and sequencing charts? Ask them for help. You will need all the support you can get from your tribe.

Several big stores sell a brightly coloured toilet insert with a step and two handles. This is transportable and can be helpful for your child when using unfamiliar toilets.

### Survival Tip 5

Diet is all-important in this game and a diet rich in fibre is advised. If this is not possible, fibre supplements can be helpful.

Parents whose children are considered to have low or high tone should be aware that this tone also affects the smooth muscle of the bowel and can lead to constipation. Constipation, in particular, needs to be treated expertly so that a child does not associate bowel actions with pain as this can lead to fear and withholding. Be sure to consult your child's doctor if your child suffers from constipation or very runny poo.

### Game Strategy

You will be required to spy on your child's toileting habits during the day from wakeup until sleep for about two weeks before you start the game.

There is no need to sit the child on the toilet every half an hour and wait for miracles. This will merely stress the two of you and put undue 'performance pressure' on you both. Sensitively peek in your child's nappy every half an hour and record the contents. Keep a careful record and start looking for patterns.

When you understand the pattern, pick four or five times when the child appears to wet more than others. This is when you need to begin putting the child on the toilet. Simply take the child to the toilet 10 minutes before each nominated time.

Showing the child a photo of him/herself sitting on the toilet and signing can be helpful as visual cues. Try and coordinate these times with the child's routines at home and preschool so that the child will know when toilet time is in relation to these routines, eg after waking up, after morning tea, after lunch and before rest time.

Try to align toilet time to approximately 20 minutes after a drink or a meal rather than before as the process of urinating and passing a bowel motion are triggered by drinking and/or eating. A visual timetable using photos or Picture Communication System (PCS) drawings can also be useful as a prompt for the child.



All children need to feel very special when they poo in the toilet and win the challenge. Use rewards that are motivating for your child.

Hugs, stickers, food treats (be vigilant about hygiene, the child might have dirty hands) etc should be given immediately when they have just done a poo, if possible, while the child is still sitting on the toilet. Too long a gap will diminish the association. Overtime the rewards can be toned down.

A very successful accessory to take on this adventure is a camera.

Where possible use photos of your child to demonstrate the steps of the toilet routine. Your initial goal is to teach your child one step only – to poo in the potty or toilet. At first you will need to do most or all of the other skills for the child.

With time you will be able to teach your child to undress, sit, eliminate, wipe correctly, flush the toilet, wash and dry hands. Guide the child's hands and use visual and verbal prompts and signs to teach these skills.

Using an egg timer/music/toys can help a child stay seated on the toilet. Initially you might have to stay in the bathroom while the child is sitting on the toilet. Eventually you will be able to phase yourself out.

Creating individualised stories can also be helpful to communicate key information about toilet training to your child.

Depending on how your child learns best, stories can be read to your child using photos or pictures to illustrate the message, taped for your child to listen to in the car or videotaped for your child to watch. The beauty about individualised stories is that they can be written specifically to cater for your child's ability and comprehension level, using appropriate and familiar language, single words or photos/pictures only and can star your child.

An individualised story could look like this.

Page 1: I go to the toilet with my mum or teacher (photo)

Page 2: I pull down my pants (photo)

Page 3: I sit on the toilet (photo)

Page 4: When I do a wee, I am happy. My mum says, "well done Jessica" and claps her hands (photo)

Page 5: I stand up and pull up my pants (photo)

Page 6: We flush the toilet and the wee goes away (photo)

Page 7: I wash my hands and now I am done (photo)

Another example of an individualised story could be as follows.

*In the morning, mum says "wake up Jessica", so I get out of bed. Mum then takes me to the toilet. I pull my pyjamas down to my knees and climb on the toilet. When I do a wee in the toilet, I am very happy and my mum says I am a very grown up girl. I get a sticker for my chart. Mum helps me clean my bottom with toilet paper. We press the special button on top of the toilet and then mum helps me wash my hands.*

Once the child is independent in the bathroom, you can teach the child how to enter on his or her own.

Start by taking the child to the bathroom. Overtime gradually withdraw your lead by taking him or her only part of the way, then just point in the direction of the bathroom and finally just say "go to the bathroom" without pointing or turning in the direction of the bathroom.

Teaching a child to recognise the need to go to the toilet and hold back until seated is also a gradual process and comes with time.

The training process begins with taking the child to the toilet 10 minutes before a nominated timeslot. This can be gradually delayed until up to 5-10 minutes after the nominated time.

Once bladder training is well established and you are a confident adventurer, you can begin bowel training your child. Simply follow the same method to become an All Star Survivor!

Overcome problems with clever strategy!

Those children who prefer to wee or poo in their nappy and withhold going in the potty/toilet can be placed on the potty or toilet in their nappy as a first step. Survival tip – with time simply make bigger and bigger holes in the seat of the nappy for the wee or poo to fall through until all fear is overcome!

Some children enjoy the sensory experience of playing with their bowel motions. These children can be dressed in suitable all-in-one style clothing which prevent access to nappies and provided with alternative acceptable forms of sensory stimulation such as playdoh.

There are several steps in the toileting routine and many skills to learn. Former survivors will tell you that patience, persistence and paying no attention to accidents will allow you to outlast the game. It is impossible to predict how long the game takes to play – it could be several months, even years.

Remember – the most important factor behind eventual success is to make toilet training a positive experience for your child. Tribal pride is on the line! Reward! Reward! Reward!

### **Good luck to all players!**

*Learning Links has a number of resources available for parents to use. Please ask your nearest branch.*

*Our thanks to the CBS Survivor television show screened on Channel 9 for the inspiration for this survival game.*



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