



# PROMOTING A HEALTHY BLADDER AND BOWEL



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Summary

# Introduction

**Bladder and bowel problems are very common but are often not discussed. This makes it difficult to seek help. Many people believe that problems are a natural part of early childhood and older adulthood. However, it is important to know that they can affect anyone at any stage in life. Continence is an important component in a person's health and well-being at any stage of life.**

Normal bowel and bladder function is an important part of a child's development and their path to adult and independent living. Failure to acquire control in a timely manner will affect schooling and education.

Increasing early intervention (or early prevention of) childhood bowel and bladder issues for all children and young people will enable them to live a healthy and happy life regardless of any bladder or bowel issue they may face.

Bedwetting (also known as nocturnal enuresis) affects around half a million children and teenagers in the UK. It's an issue families can find very isolating and difficult to talk about openly. It can take a huge toll on family life and affect kid's self-esteem and emotional well-being. Constipation is common in childhood (prevalence around 5–30% of children) and even in adults 1 in 7 suffer with constipation.

This document has been created to support, empower, offer best advice and education to children, parents, Educational staff and health care professionals to help children and young people with bladder and bowel issues and to provide information to all those working with families.



# Toilet training

Toilet training is a major skill for your child to learn and we need to help them learn. Children are able to control their bladder and bowels when they're physically ready and when they want to be dry and clean. Every child is different, so don't compare your child with others.

Most children can control their bowels before their bladder.

Some figures for you:



by age 1, most babies have stopped doing poos at night



by age 2, some children will be dry during the day, but this is still quite early



by age 3 - 9 out of 10 children are dry most days

even then, all children have the odd accident, especially when they're excited, upset or absorbed in something else



by age 4, most children are day dry

**All children will have accidents so this should be accepted and toileting reinforced. Your child should not be berated for this.**

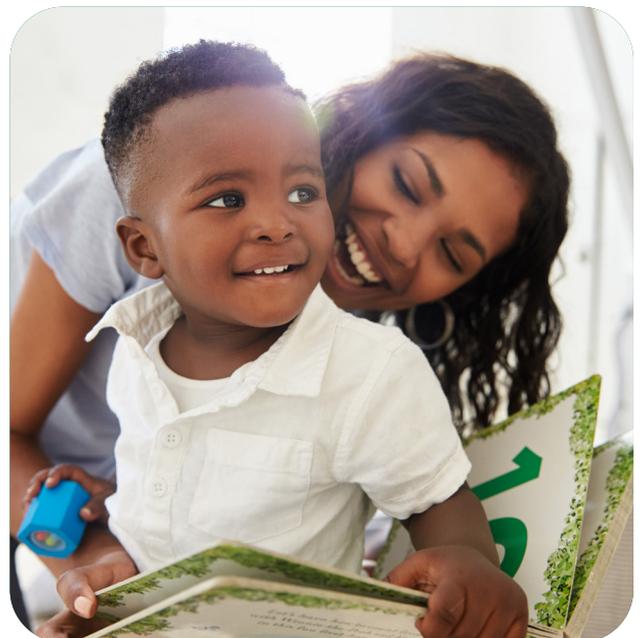
## When is the right time?

Remember, you cannot force your child to use a potty or the toilet but you can form a toileting routine early on. A good toileting routine will most times eventually work.

There is no perfect time but it is recognised that around 2 years old is a good time to begin with the toileting routine. Some people believe that their child will show 'signs' before they should start toilet training. However, it is now known that we should not depend on these, as many will not show these signs, so early routine forming is key to success.

Some people find it easier to start in the holidays particularly summer, when there are fewer clothes to take off and washed clothes dry more quickly.

Try toilet training when there are no great disruptions or changes to your child's or your family's routine, so look for a time when you have a few weeks without too many demands on your time.



## Consistency is key

If you go out, take the potty or seat with you, it's important that the routine stays the same wherever you are. It is equally important that whoever is looking after your child at any point in toilet training are doing the same thing. **CONSISTENCY** is what works.

Your child may become more aware and indicate to you:

- when they've got a wet or dirty nappy
- they may tell you they're doing it
- they may show they need to wee by fidgeting or going somewhere quiet or hidden

All of this is great if it happens but often it does not. This is why the routine and consistency are important for all children.

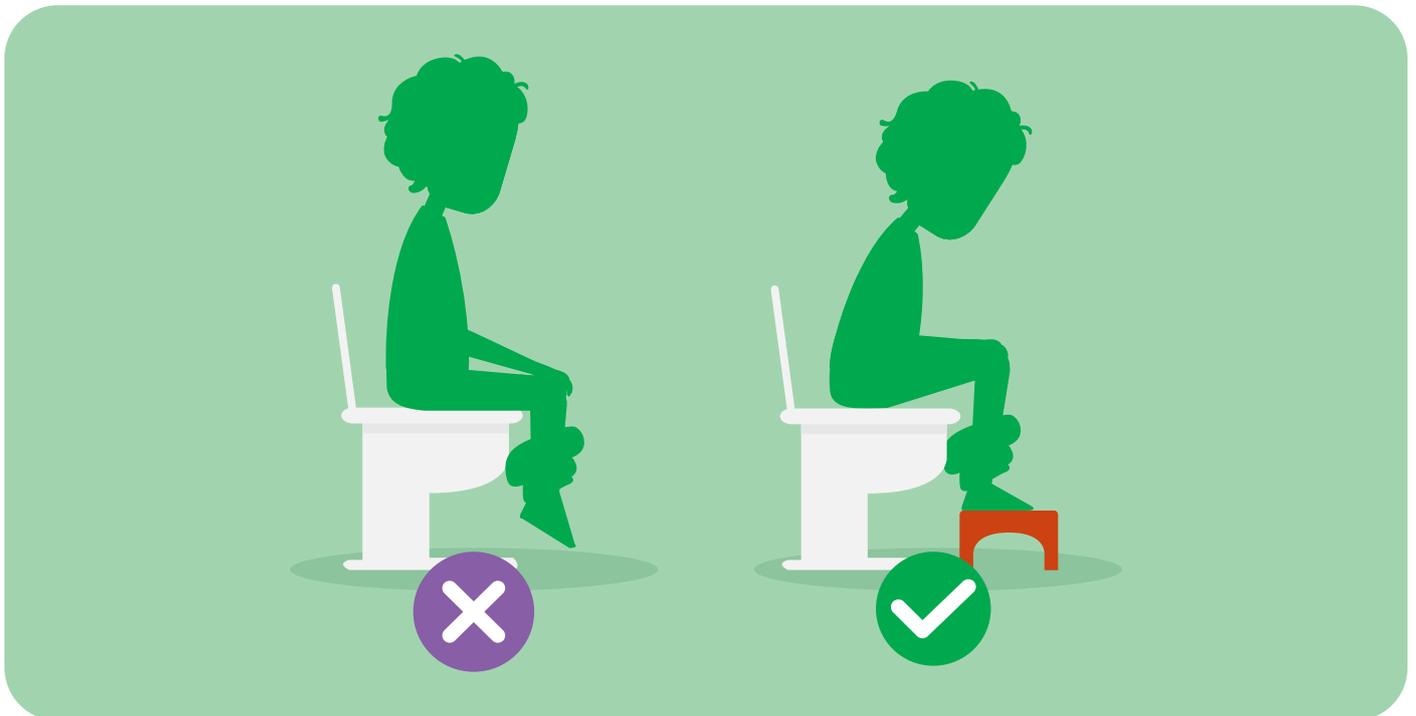


# Getting ready

A potty will be new to your child so take it slowly and let them gradually get used to it. Something colourful with fun patterns can encourage your child to sit on the potty.

Alternatively, you may want to go directly to the 'big toilet'.

Some children can manage well on a toilet but most children can find it quite fearful and feel unsteady on a toilet. There are several options to making it feel more secure. Toilet inserts can be sufficient for some children but it's a good idea to give them something to hold onto and a step under their feet to. Having their feet dangling can feel scary so a step, box or stool can be helpful, it also helps them access the toilet more independently and places their feet in a better position for toileting. Having their knees higher than their hips is the optimum position for toileting.



Toilet aid with step, handles and insert

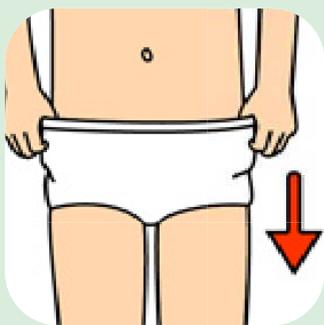


Toilet insert



Step

Talking through nappy changes helps your child to understand what wee and poo are. It is a really good idea to change nappies in the bathroom so that they learn that that's the right place for going to the toilet. Always remember to go through the toilet routine every time.



Pants down



Sit on the toilet



Do a wee  
and/or poo



Wipe bottom  
correctly



Pants up



Lid down



Flush toilet



Wash hands



Dry hands

Leave a potty where your child can see it and explain what it's for. Children learn by watching and copying. If you've got an older child, your younger child may see them using it, which will be a great help. It helps to let your child see you using the toilet and explain what you're doing. Using your child's toys to show what the potty is for can also help.

# Other tips

- Encourage your child to sit on the potty or toilet when you are changing them or getting them dressed or undressed.
- Have your child stand up when changing rather than lying down. You can have them stand up while you change them and sit them on the toilet in between the change. Changing standing up is more age appropriate and helps them get more engaged in the process than when lying down.
- If you are using a potty rather than the toilet, leave a potty where your child can see it and talk about what it is for.
- You could see if your child is happy to sit on the potty for a moment, just to get used to it, when you're changing their nappy, especially when you're getting them dressed for the day or ready for bed at night.
- There are some fun books about using a potty/toilet. You could start reading some of these books to your child to increase their interest and awareness of using the toilet or potty. *Examples include: 'Pip and Posy the little puddle' by Axel Sheffler, 'Princess Polly's Potty' or 'Pirate Pete's Potty' by Andrea Pinnington.*
- There are also YouTube videos with fun songs about toileting.
- Don't ask you child if they need the toilet, they may not recognise this yet, take them regularly and use a consistent phrase such as 'toilet time'.
- Remember that toilet training can take some time and don't be disheartened if it's not going how you wish. There will be lots of wet and soiled pants while they learn the skills required.
- If you have tried for a long time without success take a break, its better to do this than chop and change between pants and nappies.



# How to start training

**Keep the potty in the bathroom. If that's upstairs, keep another potty downstairs so your child can reach the potty easily wherever they are. The idea is to make sitting on the potty or toilet part of everyday life for your child.**

Encourage your child to sit on the potty or toilet after meals, because digesting food often leads to an urge to do a poo. Having a book to look at or toys to play with can help your child sit still.

If your child regularly does a poo at the same time each day, leave their nappy off and suggest that they go in the potty or toilet. If your child is even the slightest bit upset by the idea, just put the nappy back on and leave it a few more weeks before trying again.

Encouraging them to use the potty or toilet to wee will help build their confidence for when they are ready to use it to poo.

As soon as you see that your child knows when they're going to wee, encourage them to use their potty. If your child slips up, just mop it up and wait for next time. It takes a while for them to get the hang of it.

If you do not make a fuss when they have an accident, they will not feel anxious and worried, and are more likely to be successful the next time. Put them in clothes that are easy to change and avoid tights and clothes with zips or lots of buttons.

Your child will be delighted when they succeed. A little praise from you will help a lot. It can be quite tricky to get the balance right between giving praise and making a big deal out of it. Do not give sweets as a reward, but you could try using a sticker chart or something motivating for them.



# Training pants and pull-ups

**Disposable or washable training pants (also called pull-ups) are exactly what they say and can be handy when you start toilet training and can give children confidence when it's time to swap nappies for "grown-up" pants.**

They do not soak up wee as well as disposable nappies, so your child will find it easier to tell when they are wet. If you're changing standing up, pull-ups are not ideal for this.

Training pants are a step towards normal pants, rather than a replacement for nappies and are not provided for children with bladder or bowel issues. Encourage your child to keep their pants dry by using the potty or toilet.

If your child is not ready to stop wearing nappies and it's hard for them to know when they've done a wee, you can put a piece of folded kitchen paper inside their nappy. It will stay wet and should help your child learn that weeing makes you feel wet.



# Night-time training

**Focus on getting your child toilet trained during the day before you start leaving their nappy off at night.**

If your child's nappy is dry or only slightly damp when your child wakes for a few mornings in a row, they may be ready for night-time toilet training.

Ask your child to use the toilet or potty last thing before they go to bed and make sure it's close by, so they can use it if they need to wee in the night. There are bound to be a few accidents, so a waterproof sheet to protect your child's mattress is a good idea.

Just like daytime toilet training, it's important to praise your child for success. If things are not going well, stick with nappies at night for a while longer and try again in a few weeks' time.



# Toilet training children with additional needs

**Having their children toilet trained is a milestone all parents strive for. For some parents of children with disabilities this milestone may seem unobtainable. However clinical experience has taught us that for most children becoming toilet trained is an achievable goal and should not be delayed.**

For children with additional support needs (ASN), the lack of interest from the child often results in the initiation of toilet training being delayed until the child 'appears ready'. Unfortunately for some children, waiting until they appear ready and interested in toilet training means waiting a very long time!

Don't wait for them to give some sign of readiness – some children never will, but that does not mean that they will not be able to do it. It's often tempting to wait until they are older as there may be lots of other challenges to deal with when they are younger: managing their mobility/health needs/behaviour may feel like enough! But the longer they continue to wear their 'portable toilet' (that's what a pad/nappy is after all...) the harder it will be to introduce a new place to wee and poo, so look for the right time, and take action. The best approach is to introduce children toilet routines from around 2 years old.

Clinical experience has shown that we need to take a different approach to toilet training children with learning difficulties (LD) and processing difficulties than we do with typically developing children. Becoming toilet trained is the interaction of two main processes – physiological maturation of the bladder and bowel and social and cultural awareness. For children with LD or processing difficulties it is often the lack of understanding and social awareness that results in delayed toilet training, rather than an inherent problem within the bladder or bowel.

So rather than waiting for the child with LD or processing problems to be socially aware and motivated before toilet training commences, maturation of the bladder and bowel should be the trigger factor for starting training, with skills needed for toilet training being worked on from an earlier age. The social awareness and motivational aspects can be added in as a behaviour programme, involving lots of positive reinforcement.

Toilet training is a skill that can be broken into a number of steps and addressing each step, one at a time, makes the whole process a lot easier and more manageable for the family. Putting children on a toilet skill development programme enables them to learn the skills they would need in order to be toilet trained and once those skills are in place more formal toilet training, involving removing the day time nappy alongside scheduled sitting on the potty/toilet, can begin.



# Toilet training with a child with additional support needs

**Some children with a long-term illness, additional support needs or a disability find it more difficult to learn to use a potty or toilet and it can take a lot longer to learn the skill.**

This can be challenging for them and for you, but it's important not to avoid toilet training. For these children readiness signs may never come so we should not wait for these. It is every child's right to have an opportunity to learn to use the toilet.



# One step at a time

“One step at a time” is an approach that has been used successfully with children with a whole range of learning and processing difficulties. Each step brings the child closer to the goal of being toilet trained.

## Step 1: Setting the scene

- Introducing and encouraging changes to the routine of nappy changing, which enables the child to learn new skills and start on the path towards toilet training.
- It involves establishing healthy habits with eating and drinking and sitting on the potty or toilet at regular intervals during the day.
- Changing the child in the bathroom enables them to be more aware of the connection between wees, poos and the toilet.
- Learning about wet and dry is also introduced at this stage.
- For those children who are able to stand unsupported it is suggested that the child is changed standing up, as that way they can get more involved with the process, such as pulling pants up and down and learning about wiping their own bottom.
- Start by just getting used to sitting on the toilet at regular intervals, even with trousers up to start with so they get familiar with the toilet. Help your child to feel relaxed and happy on the toilet before proceeding, gradually building up the time they will sit on the toilet.



## Step 2:

# Developing the skills needed

- At the end of this step the child should be happily sitting on the toilet for up to two minutes or so (long enough to do a wee/poo), although at this stage the child is not really expected to use the toilet. That will hopefully be achieved in step 4.
- Flushing, washing and drying hands.
- How to use rewards and praise appropriately is an important factor.
- Symbols/Pictures for sitting on the toilet and pulling pants up and down, flushing, washing and drying hands can be shown to the child at this stage (adapt from 'Girl and Boy toiley Social Story').
- The 'reward' can gradually be faded out over a period of time, while still continuing with the verbal praise.
- Toilet toys such as bubbles or squeezey / tactile toys can help encourage the child to sit and stay on the toilet.
- Skills required to use the toilet including sitting on the toilet and pulling pants up and down.
- You could try looking at some fun books about using a potty/toilet together. Examples include: 'Pip and Posy the little puddle' by Axel Sheffler, 'Princess Polly's Potty' or 'Pirate Pete's Potty' by Andrea Pinnington.
- Rewards help engage the child in developing new skills, but it is important that any rewards that are used are kept solely for achieving the target behaviour. If the child gets the 'reward' at any other time it becomes meaningless. It is important that the reward is given immediately, with specific praise e.g. 'Good boy for sitting on the toilet!', so the child knows exactly what the reward is for.



# One step at a time

## Step 3:

### Raising awareness

- Identifying the child's habits - such as how long they can stay dry for and if there is a regular time when they have their bowels opened.
- Putting folded pieces of kitchen roll in the nappy – starting with the first nappy change of the day and checking and keeping a note hourly, will help give an idea of how often the child wees and how long they can stay dry for. This needs to be done for at least three full days (they do not need to be consecutive days). The child can be involved in the checking process.
- Before the child can move on to the next step they need to be able to stay dry for at least 1½ hours, or longer and have no underlying problem with their bowels, such as constipation. If any problems, such as frequent voids (weeing more than seven times a day) or constipation are identified, these should be addressed and then the child reassessed.
- Problems with the bladder or bowels should be assessed and treated for a child with additional needs in the same way as if the child did not have additional needs.



## Step 4:

### Using the toilet for wee and poo

- At this stage the child should be cooperating when taken to the toilet, sit happily and attempt to pull their pants up and down.
- The skills now introduced and developed include using the toilet to wee and poo, wiping their bottom and using unfamiliar toilets.
- Simple advice, regarding using the 'gastro colic reflex' (this is the movement along the bowel which normally happens after eating) to help facilitate bowel evacuations on the potty/toilet may be helpful in deciding the best times to sit the child on the potty/toilet, as will using the fact that most children void (wee) upon waking after sleep and within an hour of drinking a significant amount.
- Toilet training is best started when the child is not experiencing any other change, such as a new sibling, or moving house. It should be introduced in a matter of fact way, as a normal every day activity.
- Having an open-door policy for the bathroom, will allow the child to see other members of the family using the toilet and it will be seen as something everyone does.
- Regularly show your child symbols about going to the toilet and/or a story about going to the toilet. These can be shown when in the bathroom but also at other times of the day when your child is feeling relaxed. For symbols, look at Toileting Routine Symbols in the appendix and for stories, See 'Girl and Boy toilet social story' or 'My Story about going to the toilet' which gives a bit more detail, also in the appendix.

## Step 5:

### Night time control

- Some children will spontaneously become dry at night within a few months of being dry during the day, if not sooner. However a number of children may continue to be wet at night for some considerable time. Most children will be dry at night by the time they are 5-6 years old, but there are some children where bedwetting persists beyond their fifth birthday. It is then known as nocturnal enuresis. Those children's families need to be aware that nocturnal enuresis is a treatable condition and advised to seek help to correct the problem, rather than just leaving the child in nappies overnight.



# Summary

**The time it takes and the overall success with toilet training will depend very much on the child's individual ability, so will vary from child to child.**

There will be some children who will always require additional help or support to use the toilet, or need the occasional prompt to go to the toilet, particularly if they are busy or distracted.

Once the toilet training starts it is important that everyone involved with the child, both at home and school is aware of the programme, so that a consistent approach can be maintained.

Both families and health care professionals should remember that up to 30% of all children can have a wetting and/or soiling problem at any one time, caused by problems such as constipation, nocturnal enuresis or day time wetting – all of which need to be treated appropriately.

It should not be assumed that any child with learning or processing difficulties, who is wetting and/or soiling is doing so purely because of a delay in toilet training or a behavioural problem.

All children, including those with additional needs who present with any continence or toileting problem should have a holistic continence assessment, not only to exclude any underlying possible cause, but also to provide a correct diagnosis of the problem and help inform the direction of the toilet training programme to be implemented.



## Where do I go for more information/resources?

**Please visit:**

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)  
[www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk)

## Who do I contact locally for more advice?

**Health Visitors (0-5yrs)**

Lewis & Harris - 01851 709842  
Uist & Barra - 01870 602687

**School Nursing Team (5-18yrs)**

Lewis & Harris - 01851 763340  
Uist & Barra - 01870 602687

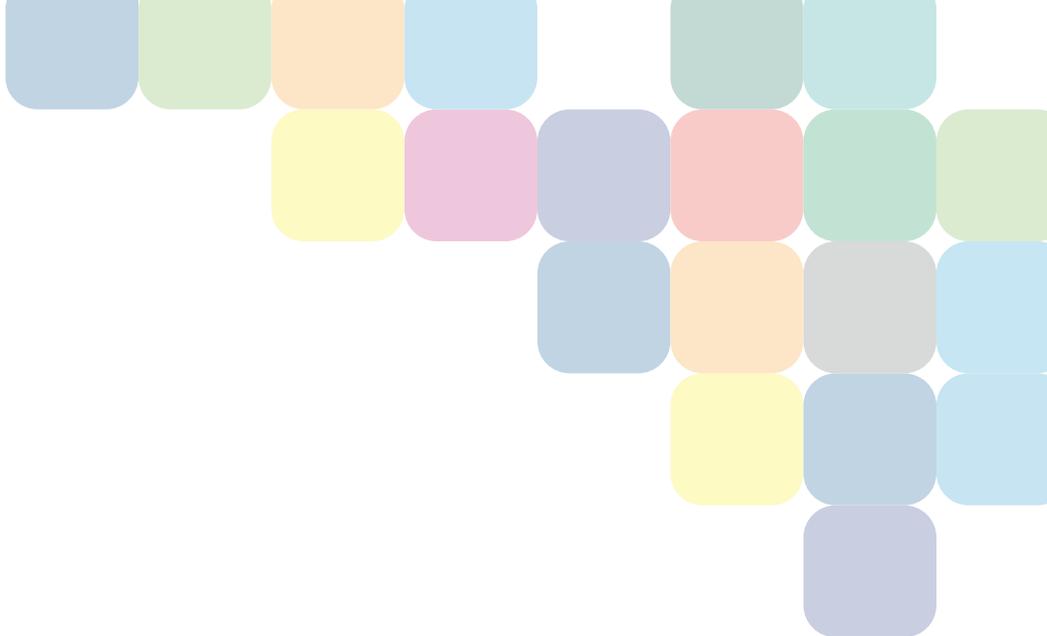
**Learning Disability Nurses**

Lewis, Harris, Uist & Barra - 01851 763335  
Mairi - 07785360256  
Paul - 07970500749

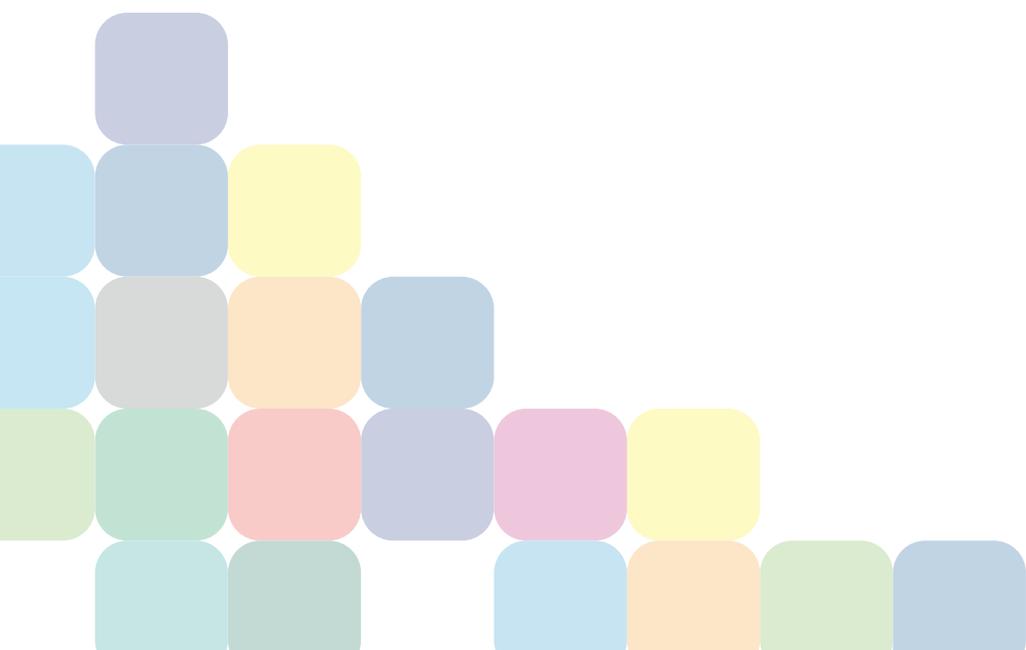
**Continence Advisor Service**

Health Centre, Springfield Road, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,  
HS1 2PS.  
Tel. 01851 763302.  
Mon-Fri: 09.00-17.30

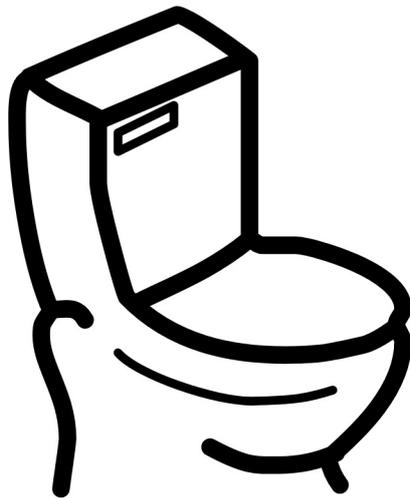




# APPENDIX 1

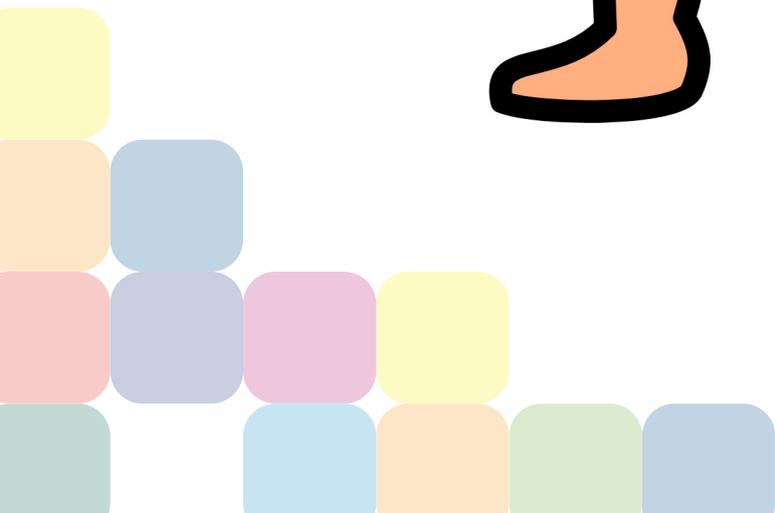
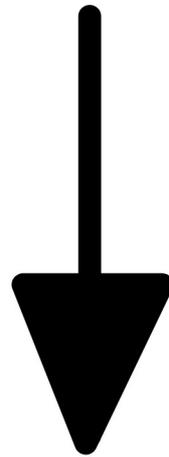
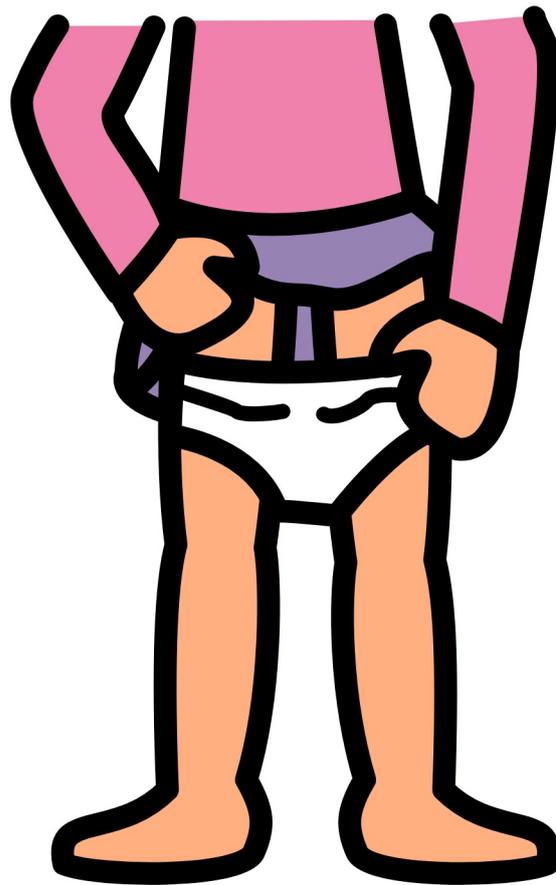


# My story about going to the toilet



When I go to the toilet  
I need to...

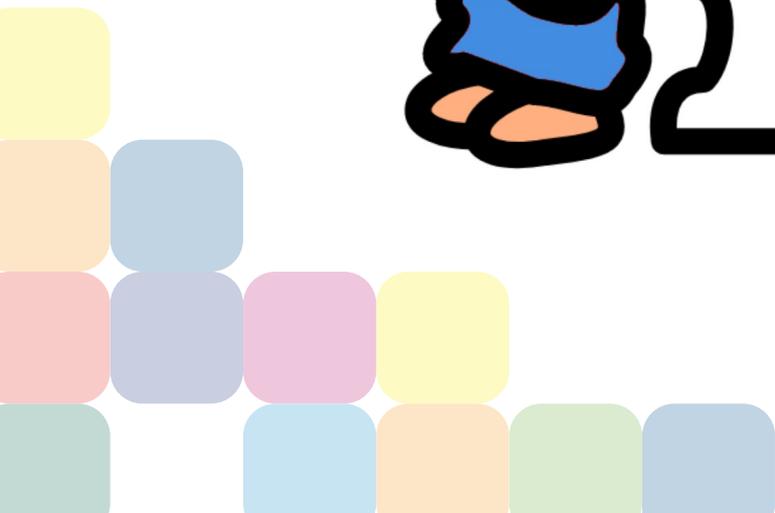
pull my  
pants down



sit on  
the toilet



do a pee in the  
toilet



Sometimes I will  
do a poo in the



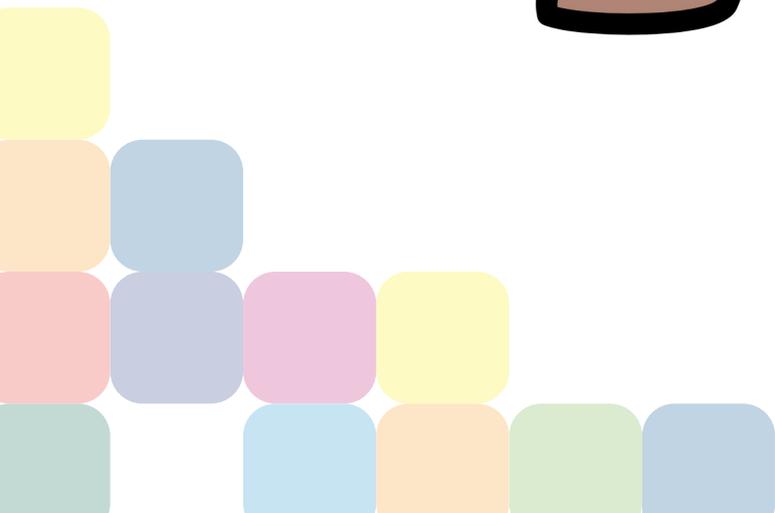
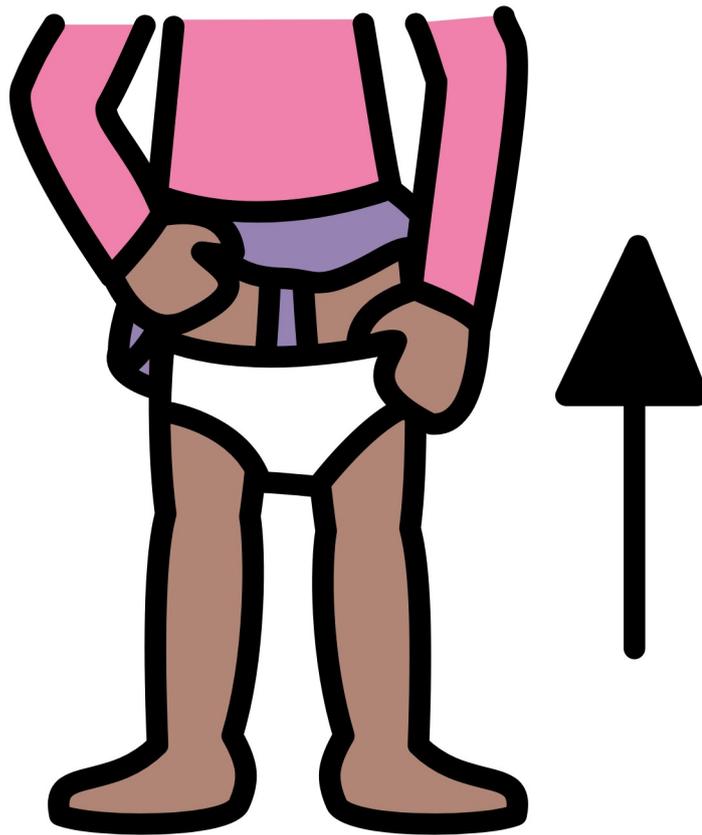
get toilet  
paper

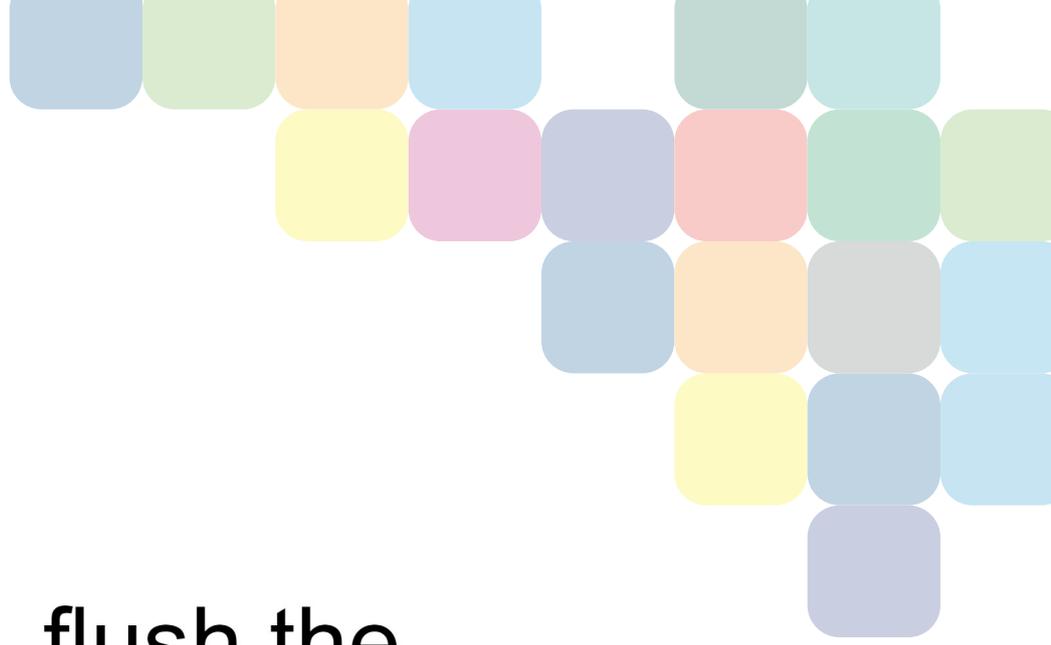


wipe my  
bottom

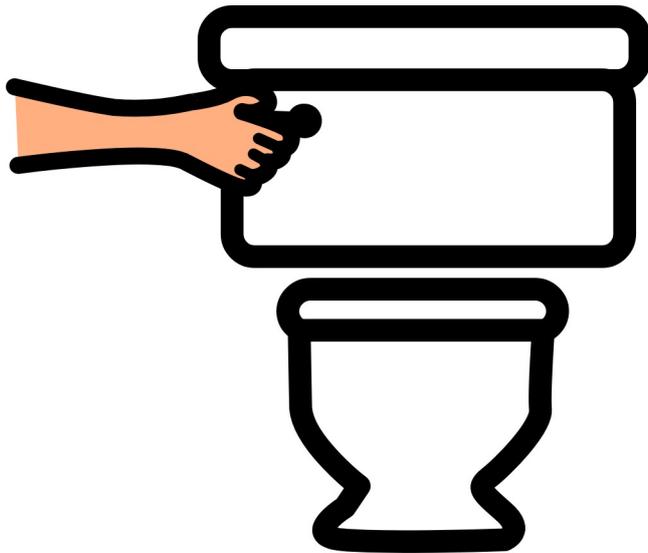


pull my pants  
up

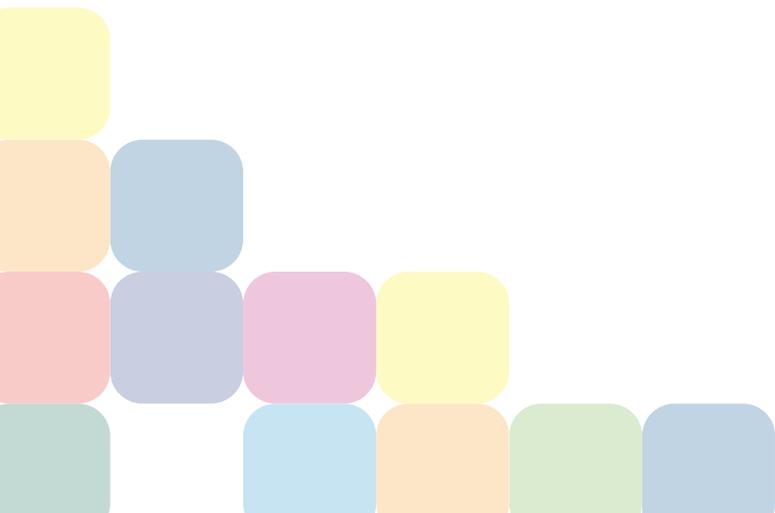


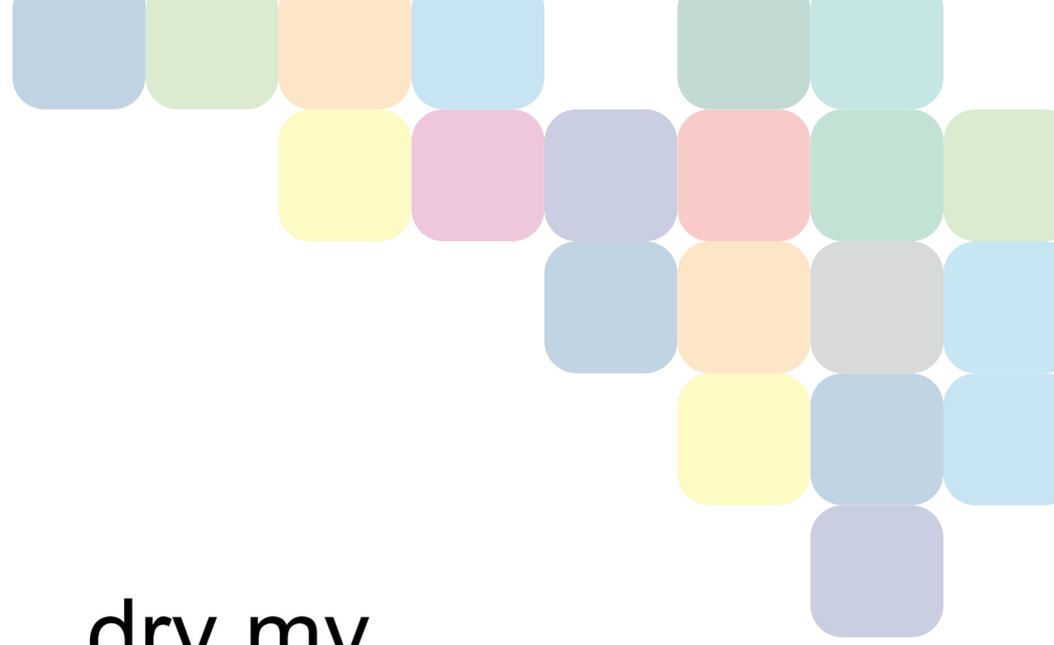


flush the  
toilet



wash my  
hands

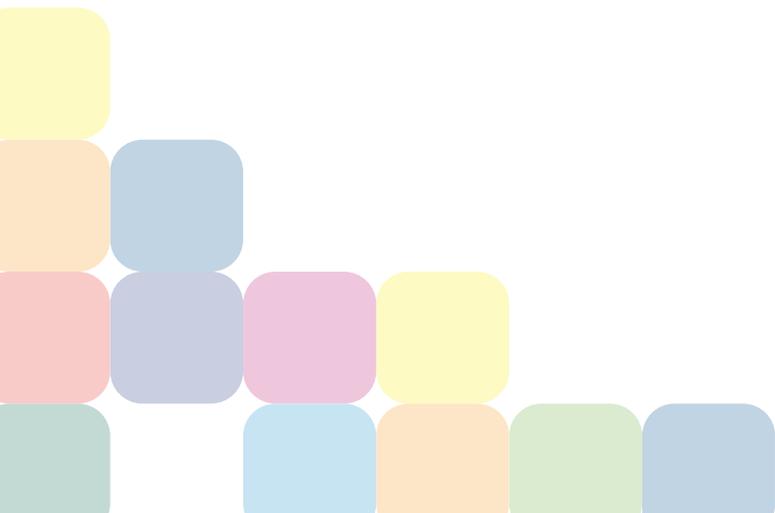




dry my  
hands

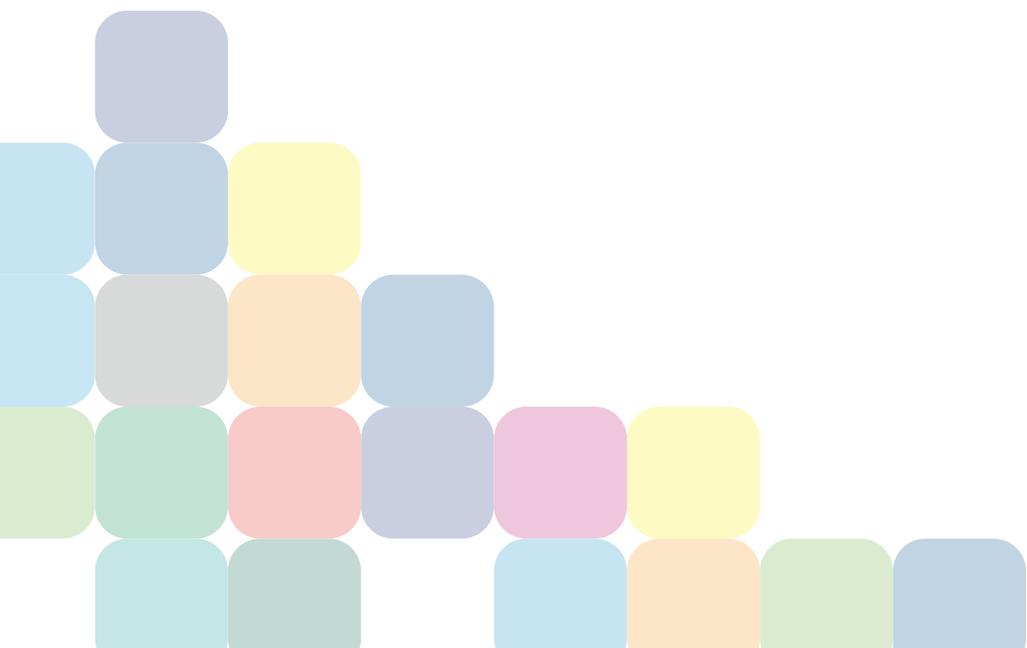


I am  
finished





# APPENDIX 2



# 11 STEPS TO DEVELOPING BLADDER CONTROL

## Day time

1

**Increase fluid intake**

(about 6-7 drinks a day)

2

**Use the toilet for a wee regularly**

(about every 2 hours)

3

**Measure your bladder capacity**

(average bladder capacity is:  $\text{age} \times 30 + 30\text{mls}$ )

## 90mins before bed

4

**No 'brown' drinks**

(coffee, tea, cocoa, cola)

## Just before sleep

8

**Think to yourself 'I'll be dry tonight'**

7

**Make sure you are warm enough in bed**

6

**Switch off any lights or TV**

5

**Try emptying your bladder**

## At night time

9

**No lifting or waking the child to toilet**

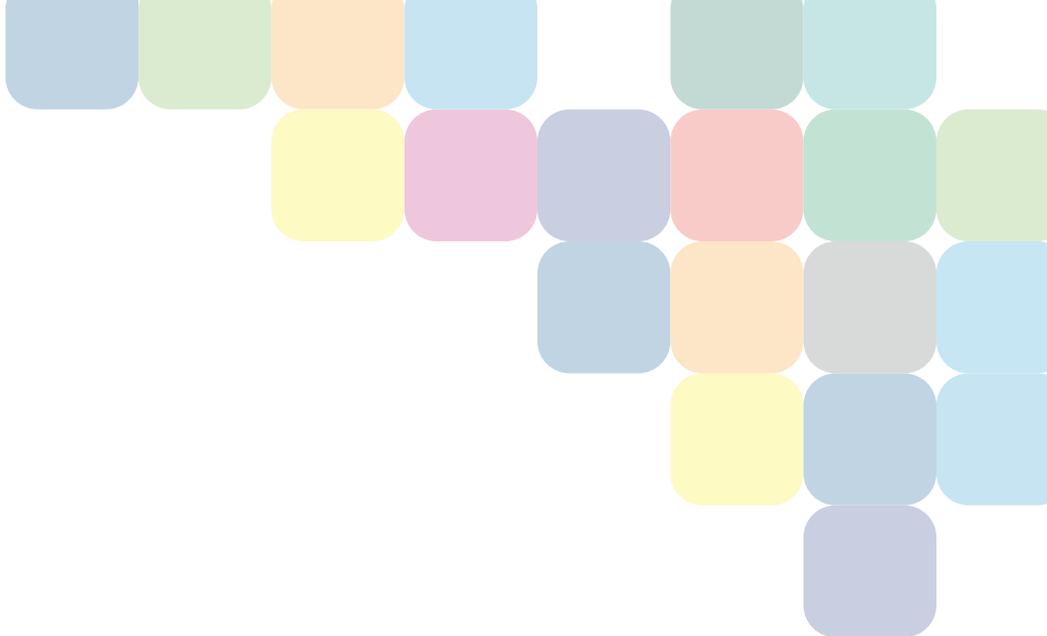
10

**Switch off any lights or TV**

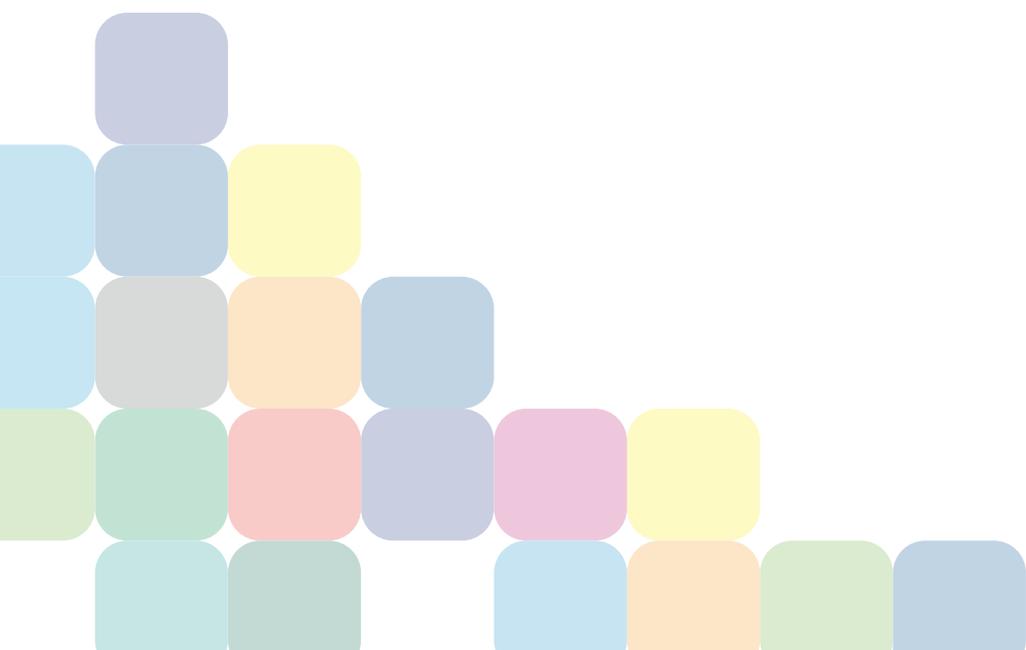
## After any dry nights

11

**Make a note as to whether you woke to toilet in the night (arousability) or slept through (vasopressin)**



# APPENDIX 3

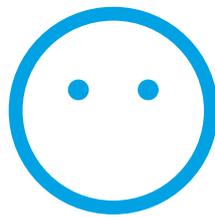
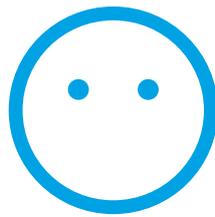
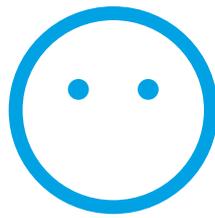




# TOILET CHART

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Draw a smile on the face when the job is done!



Reward

.....

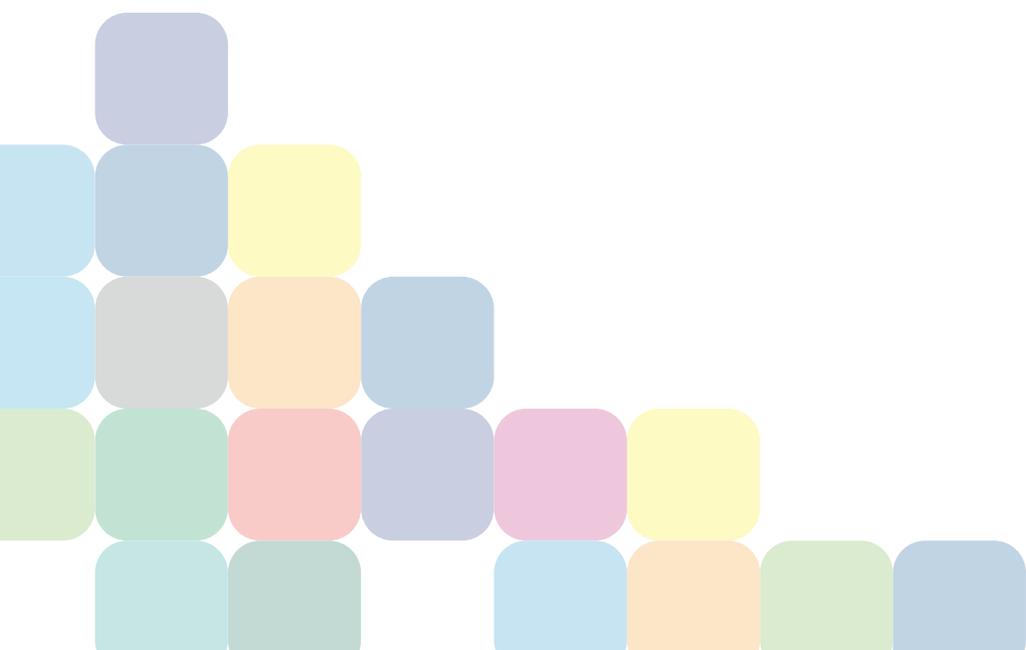
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# APPENDIX 4



# WEE CHECKER

## Hydration chart

1



### GOOD

Keep up the good work! You're drinking really well. You've got a happy, healthy bladder!

2



### GOOD

Keep up the good work! You're drinking really well. You've got a happy, healthy bladder!

3



### FAIR

Watch out! You could do with drinking a bit more please.

4



### DEHYDRATED

You really need to have a drink soon!

5



### DEHYDRATED

You really need to have a drink soon!

6



### VERY DEHYDRATED

Ouch! Your bladder and kidneys are getting worried! Have a big drink as soon as you can!

7



### SEVERELY DEHYDRATED

Thirsty? You should be – you're way overdue several big drinks. Get drinking as soon as you can – your bladder and kidneys are *NOT HAPPY!!*

## SO HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU DRINK?

6 - 8 cups every day, more when it's hot, or if you're exercising.

### Remember to spread the drinks out!

Bladder muscles like to keep fit by stretching and squeezing throughout the day.



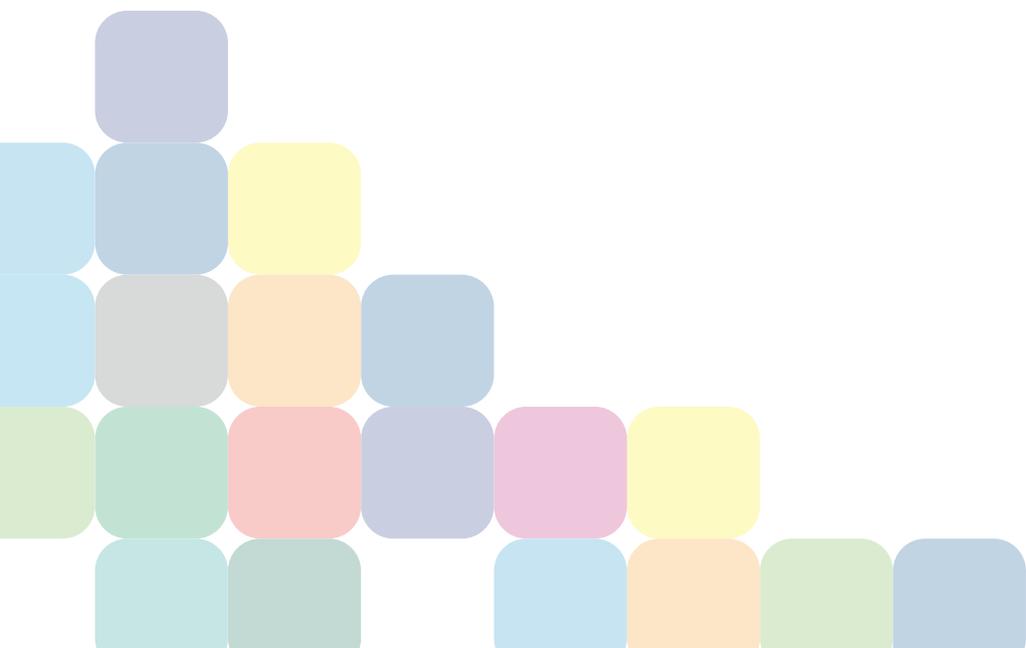
## HOW BIG SHOULD THE CUP BE?

A sensible size for your age would be:

- >> 2 year old – 120 / 150mls
- >> 5 year old – 175mls
- >> 7 year old – 200mls
- >> 11 year old – 250mls



# APPENDIX 5



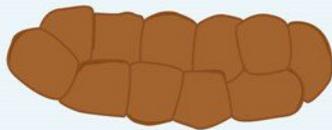
# POO CHECKER

## What's your poo telling you?



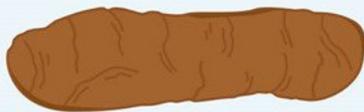
### TYPE 1

**Small hard lumps** like rabbit droppings.  
*This suggests severe constipation.*



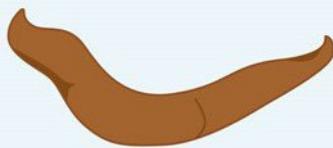
### TYPE 2

**Sausage shaped**, but hard and lumpy.  
*This suggests constipation.*



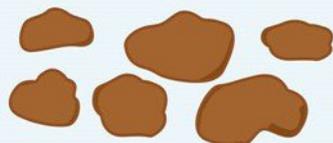
### TYPE 3

**Sausage shaped**, but hard, with cracks on the surface.  
*This suggests constipation.*



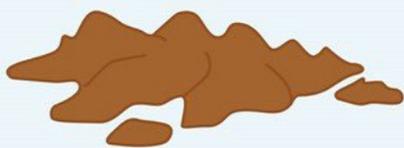
### TYPE 4

**A soft, smooth sausage** - **THE IDEAL POO!**



### TYPE 5

**Separate soft blobs**  
*May be fine if the child is well and softer poos can be accounted for e.g. increased intake of fibre or taking laxative.*



### TYPE 6

**A mushy stool**  
*May be fine if the child is well and softer poos can be accounted for e.g. increased intake of fibre or taking laxative.*



### TYPE 7

**A liquid stool**  
*This could be diarrhoea or overflow.*

*\*Based on the Bristol Stool Form Scale produced by Dr KW Heaton, Reader in Medicine at the University of Bristol.*