



# Nighttime Potty Training

Protecting sleep while supporting dry nights

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## The Golden Rule Before Anything Else

If there's one thing I want you to walk away from this guide knowing, it's this: **we do not sacrifice sleep for potty training.**

Not for dry sheets. Not for skipping a nappy size. Not for any reason.

This matters whether your child is currently in the middle of sleep training or already sleeping beautifully through the night. Nighttime dryness is a developmental milestone, one that happens to your child as their body matures, not one they can be coached or pushed through. And the moment we start disrupting sleep in the name of potty training, we've traded one challenge for a harder one.

So everything in this guide works *around* sleep, not against it.

## Is Your Child Actually Ready?

Nighttime dryness is controlled by a hormone called ADH, which signals the body to produce less urine during sleep. That system matures at different rates for every child. Some get there at three, others at five or six, and both are completely within the normal range. Age alone tells you very little.

The one sign that actually matters is this: **your child is regularly waking with a dry nappy.**

Not once in a while, regularly. Two or three dry mornings within the same week tells you their bladder has developed enough capacity to hold through the night. That's your green light.

Supporting signs to look for alongside that:

- Consistently dry after naps
- Able to hold urine for longer stretches during the day
- Expressing that they don't want to wear a nappy to bed

If dry mornings aren't happening yet, the body simply isn't ready, and no amount of preparation or persistence will change that. Keep the nappy on and check back in a few weeks.

## If You're Currently Sleep Training

This comes up often, families in the middle of sleep training who are also getting pressure (from relatives, from themselves) to drop the nappy at night too.

**My advice is to do one thing at a time.**

Sleep training asks a lot of your child. They're learning to self-settle, to stay in their sleep space, to trust the new routine you're building together. Layering nighttime potty training on top of that introduces a new variable that can genuinely undermine the sleep work which quickly creates more wake-ups, more need for parent intervention, more confusion about what the night is supposed to look like.

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## If You're Currently Sleep Training

Get sleep consolidated first. Once your child is sleeping well and you're seeing those consistent dry mornings, then you're in the right position to take on nights without a nappy. The two goals aren't in competition, they just work better sequenced.

## What Not to Do

I know these can be tempting but they break sleep in order to manage a developmental process that sleep can't actually speed up.

### Avoid:

- Waking your child during the night to use the toilet
- "Dream potty" routines where you try to get them to go while still asleep
- Scheduled night wakings at set intervals
- Bed-wetting alarms at this stage

Waking a child who has learned to sleep through the night is genuinely confusing for them. It can unravel settling patterns you've worked hard to build, and it often replaces one problem with another. If your child isn't ready to wake themselves when they need to go, an alarm or a parent-led waking isn't going to build that readiness, it just fragments sleep while you wait for the biology to catch up.

## Setting the Stage for Success

**Choose your timing well:** Pick a week without big events, transitions, or a lot of pressure on the family. Illness, travel, a new sibling, starting nursery, these are all reasons to wait. You want a calm baseline.

**Talk about it lightly:** It's great to be positive and encouraging, but try not to build this up as a major event. Nighttime dryness isn't something your child controls through effort, and if they feel the weight of expectation and then have an accident, shame and disappointment can follow. Just keep accidents neutral.

**The layered bed method:** Do this before night one: Mattress protector → sheet → mattress protector → sheet. When an accident happens at 2am, you peel off the top two layers and a clean, dry bed is already waiting. You're back to sleep in minutes. This makes a real difference in the middle of the night.

**The pre-bed potty routine:** Make this non-negotiable, even if your child insists they don't need to go. Many families find the sweet spot is two visits, once around 30 minutes before lights out, and again right at bedtime.

**A clear path if they wake:** A nightlight along the route to the bathroom, or a potty kept in the room initially, removes a barrier that might otherwise mean an accident simply because they couldn't quite make it in time.

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## When Accidents Happen

Keep it brief, boring, and dim.

Go in quietly, change them, swap the layers, and settle them back. No long conversations, no lights blazing, and avoid a bath unless it's truly necessary, getting into warm water mid-night is stimulating enough to significantly disrupt the rest of their sleep, and for some children it can accidentally start to feel like a reward.

Your energy in these moments matters. Neutral responses communicate that this is no big deal which is exactly what you want your child to believe.

## If It's Not Progressing

If you're two weeks in and accidents are happening most nights with no improvement, pause and ask yourself honestly: is my child willing but not ready, or am I ready to be done with nappies before their body is?

Both are understandable. But there's no benefit to pushing through if the development isn't there yet. Stepping back, putting the nappy back on without any fuss, and trying again in a few weeks almost always leads to a faster outcome than persisting against the biology.

And if sleep has started to unravel during this process, more wake-ups, difficulty resettling, earlier mornings, that's the clearest signal of all.

**Protect the sleep first. Everything else follows from there.**

## The Bigger Picture

Dry nights come when the body is ready. Your role is to watch for the signs, set the environment up well, and hold the process lightly. When the timing is right, this stage tends to resolve far more smoothly than parents expect.

And if you're also navigating sleep training at the same time, give yourself permission to take it one step at a time. You don't have to do everything at once.

Solid sleep is the foundation.  
Build from there.



Shelby