Every child is different and it is advisable to watch for signs in the child’s development which may suggest he/she is ready to begin potty training, such as: awareness that they are passing urine or having a bowel action; waking from naps with a dry nappy; asking to have their nappy changed.

Start at a time when you can spend a lot of time with your child, when your child seems happy and there are no major distractions or stressful events in his/her life (new brother or sister, divorce, moving, new carer etc).

A young child with hydrocephalus may have difficulty balancing when sitting. The potty or toilet should provide a stable and secure position, with a comfortable, supportive seat. If necessary, rails (or something for the child to hold on to) will give stability to the upper body. The child should be able to place his/her feet flat on the floor or a box/plinth. An occupational therapist should be able to help with equipment if the child has poor sitting balance.

Many children with hydrocephalus learn better when there is a routine. Before you begin toilet training, plan what that routine will be and stick to it until a habit is established (e.g. where the potty will be, what time to ‘try’, whether to use pants or ‘pull-ups’). Talk through each step of the routine each time, to reinforce it, being as consistent as you can. Watch the child for times he/she is most likely to have a bowel action, eg after breakfast, and try those times first.

Reinforce good behaviour ie, sitting on the potty, with praise. If nothing happens, say nothing. If it is acceptable to your family, take your child into the toilet when you or family members go, to reinforce what is expected.

It may take much longer than with other children, so be patient. Only stop as the very last resort, as children with hydrocephalus can become used to wearing nappies through habit and this can be hard to break.

Once a good habit is established, you can gently vary the routine, to allow your child to deal with changes and become more flexible.

Children with hydrocephalus may have relapses in toilet training when starting school; there is so much going on that the child may not listen to the body’s signals. They may need reminding to go to the toilet and may need showing several times where the toilet is. Classroom staff should be made aware of this.
Further information and resources

A ‘Need to Go’ card is available from ASBAH. The credit card size laminated card may help service users access toilet facilities when out and about. To find out more telephone the helpline or email helpline@asbah.org

Radar - The disability network offers a key scheme which allows people with disabilities access to locked public toilets. Visit www.radar.org.uk or telephone 0207 250 3222 to find out more.

Link magazine
The essential magazine for people with hydrocephalus and spina bifida.
Link is published quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn) and is packed with the latest news, events and issues for individuals, carers and people living with hydrocephalus and spina bifida. To subscribe contact ASBAH’s Helpline 0845 450 7755, email: helpline@asbah.org or visit our web site: www.asbah.org and click on the publications page.

Coloplast
Coloplast and ASBAH are working in partnership to campaign for an increased awareness of bladder and bowel health and to support ASBAH’s members and families in their efforts to live a full and satisfying life.

Help us
ASBAH relies on people’s generosity and support so we can help our clients who depend on us for help and advice - people with hydrocephalus, spina bifida, their families and carers. To donate to ASBAH please visit www.asbah.org or call 01733 421327.

This information has been produced by ASBAH’s medical advisers and approved by ASBAH’s Medical Advisory Committee of senior medical professionals.