

## Toilet (Teaching) Training

### Signs of Readiness

Your child may be ready to start toilet (teaching) training when he or she: can signal that the diaper is wet or soiled; can say that he or she would like to go to the potty; stops an activity for a few seconds; or clutch their diaper. This usually occurs when a child is 18 to 24 months of age. Boys typically start later and take longer to learn to use the potty than girls. It is not uncommon for a child to still be in diapers at 2 and a half to 3 years of age.

Instead of considering your child's age as a readiness indicator, it's a good idea to look for some of these other signs that your child may be ready to start heading for the potty, such as the ability to:

- follow simple instructions
- understand words about the toileting process
- control the muscles responsible for elimination
- express a need to go verbally
- keep a diaper dry for 2 hours or more
- get to the potty, sit on it, and then get off the potty
- pull down diapers, disposable training pants, or underpants

There's also no sense in beginning toilet training when *you* — or your child's primary caregivers — won't be able to devote time, patience, and a dash of humor to the process. If you're in the middle of remodeling your house or have just taken a challenging new job, you may want to wait until life eases a little.

It may be better to postpone toilet training until your child's environment is stable and secure. You may want to wait or begin more slowly if traveling, expecting the birth of a sibling, changing from the crib to the bed, moving into a new house, or when your child is sick. Take these factors into consideration when you plan to introduce toilet teaching.

If you're torn about when to start the toilet-teaching process, let your child be your guide. Don't feel pressured by others (your parents, in-laws, friends, siblings, coworkers, etc.). Many parents of past generations started potty training much sooner than many parents do today. It all depends on the child. Your child will let you know when he or she is ready.

### Getting Started

**Demonstrate** - Set it up so your child feels comfortable in the bathroom.

- Allow your child to be present when you go to the bathroom.

- Show how you wipe with toilet paper, pull up your underwear, flush the toilet, and wash your hands.
- Allow your child to see urine and bowel movements in the toilet.
- Let your child flush the toilet.
- Allow them to wipe themselves, flush, and wash their hands even if they don't go.

When you demonstrate for your child, it's helpful to explain what's going on as you're using the bathroom, and let him see afterward what you "made." Include your child in the process as much as possible.

If your child has older siblings, relatives, or friends who are toilet-trained, consider having them demonstrate, too. It can be helpful for your child to see others close to his age exhibiting the skills he's trying to learn.

You also may want to pick up a few potty-training picture books or videos for your child, which can make it easier for him to take in all this new information. *Everyone Poops*, by Taro Gomi, is a perennial favorite, as well as *Uh Oh! Gotta Go!* and *Once Upon a Potty*, which even comes in a version with a doll and miniature potty.

Keeping a book like this in the bathroom, or a poster or flipbook that illustrates the steps in using the potty, can help your child get familiar with the process and relate it to what he does in the bathroom.

## Toilet Training Equipment

What Kind of Equipment Should We Use?

There are two basic options:

- a stand-alone, toddler-size potty chair with a bowl that can be emptied into the toilet
- a toddler-size seat that can be placed on top of your toilet seat that will let your child feel more secure and not feel as if he or she is falling in

If you have a boy and are buying a potty chair, look for one without a urine guard or with a removable one. You may have to wipe up a little more stray pee, but the guards tend to bump into and scrape a boy's penis when he sits on the potty, which can discourage him from training.

If you opt for the modified toilet seat, you may also want to invest in a step stool so that your child can reach the seat comfortably. Stools can also help children to be able to push with their legs when having a bowel movement.

For boys who feel awkward or scared about standing on a stool to pee in the toilet, a potty chair may be a better option.

Buy a training potty for every bathroom in your house. Before toilet training your child, place a potty chair in your child's normal living and play area so that your child will become familiar with the potty. Consider placing a potty chair on each floor of the house if you live in a multilevel home.

Buy training potty for the car. You may even want to keep a portable toilet seat in the trunk of your car for emergencies. When traveling long distances, be sure to take a potty seat with you and stop every 1 to 2 hours. Otherwise, it can take more time than your child may have to find a discreet location or restroom.

Tell your child that the potty chair is his or her own chair. Allow your child to observe, touch and become familiar with the potty chair. Allow your child to sit fully clothed on the potty chair, as if it were a regular chair. Allow your child to leave the potty chair at anytime. Do not force your child to spend time sitting on the chair!

After your child has become used to the potty chair and sits on it regularly with his or her clothes on, try having your child sit on the potty without wearing pants and a diaper. Let your child become comfortable with sitting on the potty without wearing pants and a diaper.

The next step is to show your child how the potty chair is used. Place stool from a dirty diaper into the potty chair. Allow your child to observe the transfer of the bowel movement from the potty chair into the toilet. Let your child flush the toilet and watch the bowel movement disappear down the toilet.

## Ready to Go Potty

After your child has become comfortable with flushing the toilet and sitting on the potty chair, you may begin teaching your child to go to the bathroom.

**Clothing is important!** Make sure your child's wardrobe is adaptable to potty training. He or she should be able to get out of them quickly and on their own. Keep your child in loose, easily removable pants. In other words, avoid overalls and shirts that snap in the crotch. Simple clothes are a must at this stage and children who are potty training need to be able to undress themselves.

**Encourage your child** from the beginning to tell you when he or she is wet or has a bowel movement.

**Watch for signals.** You can start to place your child on the potty chair whenever he or she signals the need to go to the bathroom. Watch for signs that your child is urinating or having a bowel movement in his or her diaper.

- Your child may stop any activity he or she is engaged in when he or she feels the need to go to the bathroom.
- The child may "hide" or walk into an empty room.
- It may be a change of expression to indicate he or she is going.

Even if she does not tell you until after wetting or soiling her diaper, go ahead and take her into the bathroom, take the diaper off, and say, "Let's sit on the potty chair to go next time." Or when changing your child say, "Next time let's see if you can go in your potty chair." Be patient and give your child time to connect going in the diaper with using the potty chair.

**Place your child on the potty at regular intervals**, in addition to watching for signals that your child needs to urinate or have a bowel movement. This may be as often as every 1 and a half to 2 hours. Most children have a bowel movement once a day, usually within an hour after eating. Most children urinate within an hour after having a large drink.

**Stay with your child when he or she is on the potty chair.** Reading or talking to your child when he or she is sitting on the potty may help your child relax. Give your child a favorite book or a new book that will hold her attention to help her stay longer on the potty chair. Praise your child when he or she goes to the bathroom in the potty chair! Do not express disappointment if your child does not urinate or have a bowel movement in the potty. You may simply say, "Next time let's see if you can use your new potty chair." Be patient with your child.

**Have "target practice" with your little boy.** Show him how to stand so that he can aim his urine stream into the toilet. Some parents use things like cereal pieces as a sort of bull's-eye for their little guys to try aiming at.

**Don't force it.** If sitting on the potty with or without clothes is upsetting to your child, don't push it. Never restrain them or physically force them to sit there — especially if they seem scared. It's better to put the potty aside for a few weeks before trying again. Then, if they are willing to sit there, you know they are comfortable enough to proceed.

**Let your child have some time during the day without a diaper** (if you want). If he or she urinates without wearing a diaper, your child may be more likely to feel what's happening and express discomfort. (But if you opt to keep your child's bottom bare for a little while, you'll probably need to keep the potty close by, protect your rugs and carpet, and be willing to clean up.)

**What about Training Pants?** Experts sometimes disagree about whether to use disposable training pants. Some people think that they're just bigger diapers and that they might make kids think that it's OK to use them like diapers, thus slowing the toilet-teaching process.

However, because kids' nighttime bladder and bowel control often lags behind their daytime control, it isn't unreasonable to use training pants at night or when you're out and about with your child. Once the training pants remain dry for a few days, kids can make the switch to wearing underwear.

**“Big Kid Underwear”** When your child consistently seeks out the potty whenever he has to go, it's time to move on to "big-kid" underwear. Many moms and dads have found that undies with a favorite character on them, or ones the child has picked out, give kids a dandy incentive to stay dry.

## **Recognition and Rewards**

You may want to offer your child small rewards, such as stickers or time reading with Mommy or Daddy, every time your child goes in the potty. To help keep track of your child's successes, you might want to keep a chart. Once your little one appears to be mastering the use of the toilet, you might want to let him or her pick out a few new pairs of big-kid underwear to wear whenever your child puts the pee or poop in the potty.

## **Partnering with Your Child's Teacher**

Make sure all of your child's caregivers – including teachers, in-home babysitters, and grandparents -- follow the same routine. Let them know how you're handling the issue and ask that they use the same approaches so your child won't become confused.

## Introducing Night Training

Don't give away that stash of diapers just yet. Even when your child is consistently clean and dry all day, it may take several more months, or even years, for him to stay dry all night. At this age, their body is still too immature to wake them up in the middle of the night reliably just to go to the bathroom.

When you're ready to embark on night training, your child should continue to wear a diaper or pull-up to bed, but encourage him to use the potty if he has to pee or poop during the night. Have him use the potty right before going to bed, and then again right when he gets up. Tell him that if he wakes up in the middle of the night needing to go, he can call you for help. You can also try putting the potty near the bed so it can be used right there.

If your child manages to stay dry for five nights in a row, it's a good time to start nighttime training in earnest. Put a plastic sheet under the cloth one to protect the mattress, and put your child to bed in underwear (or nothing) and see how it goes.

There's not much you can do to help things along, short of limiting liquids before bedtime. So if your child doesn't seem to get the hang of it, put her back in nighttime diapers and try again in a few months.

## Final Thoughts

Above all, be sure to praise your child's attempts to use the toilet, even if nothing happens. And remember that accidents **will** happen. It's important **not** to punish potty-training children or show disappointment when they wet or soil themselves or the bed. Instead, tell your child that it was an accident and offer your support. Reassure your child that he or she is well on the way to using the potty like a big kid.

**Handle setbacks gracefully.** Virtually every child will have several accidents before being able to stay dry all day long. When this happens, don't get angry or punish your child. After all, it's only recently that his muscle development has allowed him to hold his bladder and rectum closed at all, and he's still learning why it's important to use the potty. Mastering the process will take time.

**How long will it take to toilet train my child?** It may take up to 3 months to learn to use the potty and an additional few months to be successful with few accidents. It is important for you to be patient and supportive. Do not punish your child when he or she has an accident.

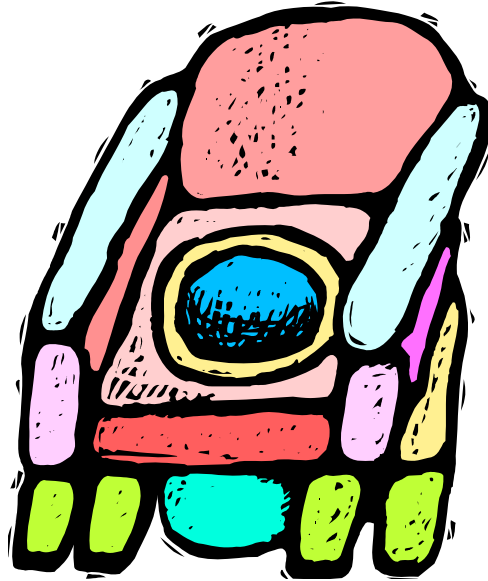
If your child is still not toilet trained, consult your family doctor. The most likely reason your child has not learned to use the potty is that your child is not yet ready for toilet training.

**Jump for joy — you're done!** Believe it or not, when your child is mentally and physically ready to learn this new skill, she will. And if you wait until he or she is really ready to start, the process

shouldn't be too painful for either of you.

When it's over, reinforce your child's pride in their achievement by letting them give away leftover diapers to a family with younger kids, or by packing up the cloth diapers and sending them away with the diaper delivery service one last time.

And don't forget to pat yourself on the back. Now you won't have to think about diapers ever again — at least, not until the next baby.



## TOILET TRAINING (TEACHING) RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

**Compiled by: Lee Williams, M.Ed.**  
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Resources:

- ❖ American Academy of Family Physicians
- ❖ Betsy Bozdech, Reviewed by the [BabyCenter Medical Advisory Board](#)