

# Potty Training



For many parents, one of the most frustrating skills to teach their child is how to use the toilet. Advice from friends and family may include comments like: “Start toilet training right after he’s walking,” and “Get that boy out of diapers as soon as possible.” While advice from experts may be, “Take it slow, wait until he’s ready.” All the while, parents are wondering, “How will I know when he’s ready?” or “My daughter is really smart, so won’t she learn to use the bathroom quickly?”

## Children Can Learn About Independent Toileting in a Variety of Ways

- As the child shows interest, let him dress and undress himself.
- Use words to identify bodily functions (use words that you’re comfortable with but avoid words which imply that elimination is something bad). Use words to describe what you see him doing. For example, when he grabs the front of his diaper, say, “It looks like you’re going pee pee” or when he runs behind the couch and makes grunting sounds, say, “It looks like you’re pooping.” Note: Don’t ask him if he is peeing or pooping. He will most likely say “NO!” Get a potty chair or an adapter seat for the toilet. Talk about its use. Let him try sitting on it with clothes on.
- Read children’s books about using the toilet – if he’ll listen. If he won’t, that is a clear signal he’s not interested right now.
- When changing diapers say, “Someday you’ll put your pee pee in the toilet like mommy.”
- Encourage picking up toys and putting them in the proper place. This encourages the concept that there is a place for everything. Allow him to see you using the toilet and washing your hands afterward.

## Readiness Signs for Learning to Use the Toilet Include All Areas of Development

- **Language:** Children need to be able to use words to indicate urination and bowel movements.
- **Cognitive:** Children must understand the toileting process. There are three stages of awareness of elimination.
  - *Stage 1:* He knows after he has wet or soiled his diaper.
  - *Stage 2:* He knows he is wetting or soiling right then.
  - *Stage 3:* He is aware that his body is signaling a need to go to the bathroom. Children need to be moving from Stage 2 awareness to Stage 3 awareness before parents begin attempting to teach specific toileting skills.
- **Self Help:** Children need to be able to walk to the bathroom, pull their pants and diapers off and place themselves on the toilet. Toddlers always need adult supervision in the bathroom.
- **Emotional:** Children must WANT to use the toilet. They must have a desire to do something completely different with their body processes. Emotional readiness is often overlooked during the potty training process.
- **Motor:** Children must have the ability to hold bowel movements or urine until they get to the toilet. Be aware that muscle development is an internal process.

## Important Points to Remember

- When there are stressful events at home, such as a new baby, change in childcare or moving to a new home, do not attempt to teach toileting. It is also important to know that a child who has been potty trained for months may need to go back to diapers for awhile during stressful times.
- It is okay to go back to diapers when he is having lots of accidents.

- Parents CAN'T control the potty training process through positive or negative means. Rewarding him with candy or special prizes when he uses the toilet may backfire due to too much pressure to perform. Instead, say, "You peed in the toilet. You must be so proud of yourself."
- Do not use any forms of physical or verbal punishment for toileting accidents. These tactics will cause him stress, which will prolong the entire process and may cause medical problems.
- Most children develop the ability to use the toilet between the second and fourth birthdays.
- Potty training is a process. As in all developmental processes, there may be spurts of growth followed by lags or even regression.
- Nighttime dryness may or may not happen at the same time as daytime dryness.
- Maintain a positive relationship with your child throughout the potty training process.

## Parent's Role in the Potty Training Process

Remain matter-of-fact and neutral while encouraging his interest. Offer choices about when and if he wants to use the toilet. For example, when you notice him straining before a bowel movement, say, "It looks like you need to poop. Do you want to poop in your diaper or in the toilet?" Respect your child's decision without question. One day he will choose to use the toilet.

Discuss your approach to potty training with your child's other caregivers to promote consistency.

Until he has made the choice to use the toilet, let him continue to wear diapers. Although children often become stressed when their clothes are soiled, they will not likely be convinced to use the toilet to avoid soiling.

Stay as calm as possible. If you are having difficulty with potty training, call your healthcare provider or your county health department and ask to speak to a Child Guidance professional.

## Recommended Books

*Going to the Potty* by Fred Rogers

"It's Potty Time" (video) Duke University

*Uh Oh! Gotta Go!* by Bob McGrath

*Toilet Learning* by Alison Mack (for children and parents)

*Once Upon a Potty* by Alona Frankel (his and hers versions, with videos)

*Your New Potty* by Joanne Cole

*Sam's Potty* by Barbro Lindgren

*No More Diapers!* by Joae Graham Brooks



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