

Toilet Training

Many parents are unsure about when to start “potty training.” Most children begin to show signs of readiness between 18 and 24 months, although some may be ready earlier or later than that. And boys often start later and take longer to learn to use the potty than girls.

Look for 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
- show an interest in using the potty or wearing underpants

Timing

There are some stressful or difficult times when you may want to avoid starting the toilet-teaching process — when traveling, around the birth of a sibling, changing from the crib to the bed, moving to a new house or when your child is sick (especially if diarrhea is a factor). It may be better to postpone it until your child's environment is stable and secure.

How long does it take?

The process often takes between 3 and 6 months, although it may take more or less time for some children.

While some kids can learn to make it through the night without wetting or soiling themselves or the bed *and* use the potty around the same time, it may take an additional month to even years to master staying dry at night.

Potty types

The two basic potty options are:

1. a standalone, toddler-size potty chair with a bowl that can be emptied into the toilet
2. a toddler-size seat that can be placed on top of your toilet seat that will let your child feel more secure and not fear falling in

If you opt for the modified toilet seat, consider getting a stepping stool so that your child can reach the seat comfortably. Stools can also help kids learn to push with their legs when having a bowel movement.

It's usually best for boys to first learn to use the toilet sitting down before learning to pee standing up. 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.

About training pants

Experts sometimes disagree about the use of disposable training pants, often called “pull ups.” Some think that they're just bigger diapers and might make kids think it's OK to use them like diapers, thus slowing the toilet-teaching process.

Others feel that training pants are a helpful step between diapers and underwear. Because kids' nighttime bladder and bowel control often lags behind their daytime control, some parents like using training pants at night. Others prefer that their child use training pants when they're out and about. Once the training pants remain dry for a few days, kids can make the switch to wearing underwear.

Common problems

It's common for a previously toilet-taught child to have some trouble using the potty during times of stress. For example, a 2- or 3-year-old dealing with a new sibling may regress by returning to a previous level of development.

But if your child was previously potty trained and is having problems, talk with your doctor to rule out things like an infection.

If your child is 3 years or older and is not yet potty trained, talk to the doctor, who can help determine the problem and offer advice to make the process easier.

Tips for toilet teaching

Even before your child is ready to try the potty, you can prepare your little one by teaching about the process:

- Use words to express the act of using the toilet: “pee,” “poop” and “potty.”
- Ask your child to tell you when a diaper is wet or soiled.
- Identify behaviors (“Are you going poop?”) so that your child can learn to recognize peeing and pooping.
- Get a potty chair your child can practice sitting on. At first, your child can sit on it clothed. Then, he or she can sit on the chair with a diaper. And when ready, your child can go bare-bottomed.

If you've decided that your child is ready to start learning how to use the potty, these tips may help:

- Set aside some time to devote to the potty-training process.
- Don't make your child sit on the toilet against his or her will.
- Show your child how *you* sit on the toilet and explain what you're doing, because your child learns by watching you.
- Establish a routine. You may want to begin toilet

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teaching by having your child sit on the potty after waking with a dry diaper, or 45 minutes to an hour after drinking lots of fluid.

- Try catching your child in the act of pooping. Children often give clear cues that they need to use the bathroom — their faces turn red, and they may grunt or squat. And many kids are regular as to the time of day they tend to have a bowel movement.
- Have your child sit on the potty within 15-30 minutes after meals.
- Remove a bowel movement (poop) from your child's diaper, put it in the toilet and tell your child that poop goes in the potty.
- Make sure your child's wardrobe is adaptable to potty training. For example, avoid overalls and shirts that snap in the crotch.
- Some parents let their child have some time during the day without a diaper. If he or she urinates without wearing a diaper, your child may be more likely to feel what's happening and express discomfort.

- When your son is ready to start peeing standing up, have "target practice." 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 target for their little guys to try aiming at.
- Offer your child small rewards, such as stickers, every time he goes in the potty. Keep a chart to track successes.
- Make sure all of your child's caregivers — including babysitters, grandparents and childcare workers — follow the same routine and use the same names for body parts and bathroom acts so your child won't become confused.

Be sure to praise all 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 is well on his way to using the potty like a big kid.