

Toilet Training Basics

The day your child is used to the idea of using a potty – and then finally a toilet – may seem very far away. Not to worry: With patience, your toddler will slowly but confidently pick up the habit.

Believe it or not, toilet training is a straightforward process – for you, and for your child. Your toddlers may even be able to pick it up in a few days, but more likely it will take a few months to master the habit. The key for any parent is waiting until your child seems ready to begin to learn about the potty. By being patient and waiting out the months where you'd prefer your child to be potty trained – but your little one clearly has other developments in mind – you will be doing both you and your child a favour. One mistake active and concerned parents sometimes make is seeing potty training as their project, for their own success or failure. Not only is potty training not a matter of “success,” or “failure,” but the project should be seen as your child's alone. You should not feel either overly proud or, overly disappointed in your child's potty progress. Instead, see it as a separate endeavour that your child is embarking on. In a sense, you should think about your toddler's potty training as “none of your business”; you should not get your sense of confidence as a parent wrapped up in how soon your child chooses to use the potty.

But what is the recommended age at which you should begin potty training your child? At what point after that can you expect your child to be completely diaper-free? A good recommendation is not to start before the age 2. Before that age, most children's bladders empty so often that it's too difficult for them to control – and because they're not tuned in to having to “go,” it's useless to begin teaching them. The key: Wait for your child to demonstrate “readiness” first.

Being Ready

It would be so convenient if it happened this way: You wake up one morning after your child's second birthday, and when you go to pick up your child, your little one looks up at you and says, “Potty today.” You would have just received your first blatant hint that your child is now ready to begin potty training; from there on in, no more diapers! No more wet pants! And all of it perfectly initiated by your little potty genius. Well, for good and for bad, our children like to keep things a bit more interesting and unpredictable.

Even though you may hear otherwise from busybodies at the playground, your in-laws, or well-intentioned friends, you should know that there is no “right” age to toilet train a child. Every single toddler and child goes at an individual pace. For toilet training, there is no reliable “average” that you should follow; there is only information about a common range in which most children begin the process. While children begin to master most of the necessary skills between the ages of 18 and 30 months, your toddler may not be ready to truly begin toilet training until as late as the end of year four. While this may seem unbelievably late, it is actually within the perfectly normal range. A good rule of thumb for nervous Moms and Dads: No, your child will not begin kindergarten wearing a diaper. Even if it looks like it will turn out that way, it is so rare for that kind of lateness to occur that most parents have nothing to worry about.

And while it may seem like your toddler is taking forever to be ready for the potty, in fact you are bearing witness to an important but drawn-out preparation process. Instead of thinking your child is simply “lazy” by sticking to diapers and not rushing to the toilet, or should try to think of it as your toddler's way of ensuring an efficient ease and grace when it comes to finally climbing up on the potty. The more prepared your child is when you start the toilet training process, the quicker and surer that process will be. After all, a 4-year-old is bound to understand the concept of “potty” and how to read the body's signals better and quicker than a 2-year-old would. But don't create a deadline for your child to meet; that can put unnecessary pressure on your little one. Demonstrate the crucial potty training steps, but leave mastering each one to your toddler.

Another tip: Don't start toilet training when there are other big changes in your child's life. It's best to start toilet training when life is relatively calm. If you're moving, having another baby, starting your child in a new school or with a new caregiver, or experiencing any other changes that seem like big ones for your child, delay toilet training until things have stabilized. (Wait until your toddler has spent a few weeks in your new home, for instance, or with the new caregiver – or whenever you sense your child is again at ease.) If you do end up adding potty training to a list of upheavals in your child's life, potty training and the toilet will be forever linked in your child's mind with a sense of being out of control and less than confident – rather than the ideal, which is having the potty being linked with confident and happy feelings.

As a parent, your number one job in toilet training tips to avoid feeling pressured to train your child ASAP. Even if you have time limitations or caregiver considerations, resist the pressure: Your anxiety about toilet training can create anxiety in your child. Toilet training is not a competition. Your role is to encourage your child by fostering independence, and to allow your child to master each step at a reasonable pace. You must be prepared to devote

some of your own time and emotional energy to providing direction, motivation, and reinforcement on a daily basis. If the preschool you've been checking out won't take children until they're toilet trained, for instance, then you may just have to find another preschool – it's that important to let your child go a pace that's comfortable.

Other tips to bear in mind:

- * Take care of your child's skin. The tender bottom area is just likely to get a rash due to wetness or exposure to stool now as it did when your child was an infant. Keep your toddler dry by changing regularly.
- * Don't leave your child in soiled clothing as a toilet training method. Letting your child sit in wet or soiled underwear, training pants, or diapers will only make the skin on the bottom sore and tender to passing urine, increasing the chance that your toddler will resist going. Help your toddler change pants quickly.
- * Make sure to coordinate your toilet plans with whom ever is with your child during the day. It's important that your toddler receives the same message whether or not you're there.
- * Feed your child high-fiber foods and lots of water, which will contribute to keeping your child's stool soft – making bowel movements easier to pass.
- * Expect accidents. All parents have to cope with an occasional mess; try not to display any anger or impatience when your child has an accident.
- * Consider your child's temperament and style of behaviour. Your toddler's pace and general level of activity will dictate the potty progression. Think about your child's moods – at what time of day is your little one most approachable and cooperative? That's time to introduce toilet training. If your toddler is generally shy and a bit withdrawn, successful toilet training may take more encouragement and support than if your toddler is outgoing.
- * Work with your child's attention span – plan for distractions that will keep your child comfortable on the potty, such as a book, song, or puppet show.
- * Don't forget to take your child's frustration level into account. Reassure your toddler that accomplishment will occur in your child's own time. Your patience and encouragement will help this process along immeasurably. Expressing your support and love in what can be a tough time is key.

Boys vs. Girls

Although most parenting tasks don't differ depending on whether you have a boy or a girl, toilet training is one of those where you can see predictable difference that you should take into account. Boys learn to stand up to urinate from imitating other men or boys, so if you have a son, make sure that Dad is providing a role model by demonstrating. Do be prepared to clean up after your son for a while – it can be hard to aim at first. But boys and girls will initially learn to use the potty sitting down. If boys start out standing to urinate, they may not understand why they have to sit down again to have a bowel movement. Keep in mind: Boys also tend to take slightly longer to toilet train than girls.