

## Potty Training

Potty training is one of those parenting challenges that everyone seems to have an opinion about. Parents feel judged by how fast they can move their children through various stages, especially using the toilet alone. None of my children were potty trained before three years old, but even I wrongly became a critic when a friend's daughter potty trained six months later than my children. I don't know why parents hold potty training in such a valued position. The truth is, the age at which children are physically and emotionally mature enough to learn to control their bladder and bowel functions varies greatly between children.

## Signs That Your Child Is Ready

The success of potty training really depends on how ready your child is rather than a specific age. Most children, especially boys, are not physically able to control their bladder or bowel movements until they are at least eighteen months old. Typically, children start to show interest in potty training at about two years old, but some children are not ready until age three or later.

## Is Your Child Ready?

### Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your child seem interested in learning?
- Is he curious about the toilet, potty chair, or about wearing underwear?
- Can your child understand and follow basic instructions?
- Can your child tell you when he has the urge to go potty?
- Does your child stay dry as long as two hours?
- Are his bowel movements predictable?
- Does your child hate a dirty diaper?
- Can your child pull his own pants down and up without help?

Answering yes to most of these questions is an indicator of your child being ready for training. If you answered most questions "no," you may need to wait a while. If your child has recently or is about to face a major change, such as a move or the arrival of a new sibling, it is also a good idea to wait until things are a bit more settled. A toddler who opposes potty training today may be open to the idea in a few months.

## Are You Ready for Potty Training?

Starting potty training during a time of change, like moving or traveling, beginning day care, or bringing home a new baby, can make training impossible. Potty training needs to happen during a relatively stress-free and relaxed period. Then you can focus your energy, time, and attention on your little one.

### Things You Will Need:

- Potty Chair
- Rewards
- Plastic Training Pants or Pull-Ups
- Stool

## Getting Started

Beginning around age two, your child has a natural desire for order. He likes his own shelves for toys, his own plates and spoons, his own chair, and also his own place for using the toilet. A child-sized potty chair is less threatening than an adult toilet and can be moved or taken on car trips if needed.

Place his potty chair on the floor next to your toilet. Wait for your child to go along with you to the bathroom. Let him decide on his own to sit on the potty just like Mommy or Daddy. He may sit without you even saying anything. If he doesn't sit on his own after a few times, place him on the chair when you sit on yours. Allow your child to sit on the chair with his clothes on, reading or sitting if he wants to at this stage.

Now is the time to begin talking about using the toilet. Teach your child words to describe what their body is doing such as going "pee" or "potty" and "poop." Discussing the toilet and reading and watching videos about potty training makes toilet training much easier.

## Encourage a Routine

The day has come to begin training. Take a deep breath, get out the undies, rewards, and wake up your child. Let her know that the first thing she needs to do every morning is sit on the potty. Try not to let her sleep in too late so that she doesn't have an accident in her sleep.

Schedule potty breaks. Take your child to the potty chair several times a day. Have him sit without a diaper and stay with him while he's in the bathroom. Offer praise for trying to use the potty even if he just sits there. Let her know that every time she pees or poops in the toilet or potty-chair, she gets to pick from the rewards you have for her. Let your child sit on the potty-chair or toilet for as long as he will tolerate it. If after 10 or 15 minutes he doesn't use the toilet or potty-chair and wants up, let him up.

## Remove the Diapers

After a few times of successful potty breaks where he eliminates into the chair, remove his diapers and let him run around without them. Continue your potty schedule. Pull-ups feel like diapers and lessen bladder and bowel awareness because they absorb the pee and poop. An uncovered bottom helps your child learn how his body works. When leaving the house, have your child use the potty right before you leave. When you arrive, learn where the restrooms are first thing. Ask your child if he needs to go potty before you begin to shop. If your child needs to go potty in the middle of shopping, go immediately to the restroom. Bring spare clothes in case of an accident.

## Accidents

Treat mistakes lightly. They are bound to happen, especially if your child is in a new place or is tired. Accidents often happen because your child is too absorbed in an activity and is ignoring his needs. When accidents happen, stay calm. Don't punish the accident. Remind your child to remember to use the potty every time he has to go and to listen to his body. Help and teach him to wipe up his own messes to encourage him to take care of his own body.

## Know When to Stop Training

If your child refuses to use the potty or is having lots of accidents, he might not be quite ready for potty training. Take a break and try again in a few months.

Resources:

1. Toilet training. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://patiented.solutions.aap.org/handout.aspx?gbsid=156575&resultClick=1>. Accessed July 16, 2019.
2. Guide to Toilet Training (Copyright © 2003 American Academy of Pediatrics)