

## ABC of POTTY TRAINING

Most parents eagerly anticipate potty training as a milestone in their child's development -- if for no other reason than that it means an end to changing diapers. But few moms and dads are prepared for how long it can take. Yes, some children get it within a few days. But many more take several months. You and your child have a better chance of success if you know the basics of training and can make the process clear to your child.

### A -- Assess your child's readiness

Most people begin training when their child is about two, but some kids may not be ready until well into their fourth year. Watch for the right signs, such as imitating others' bathroom habits, and don't pressure your child to start before he's ready. It's worth running through a basic checklist to see if he is ready.

### B -- Buy the right equipment

First and foremost, this means investing in a child-sized potty or a special seat to attach to your regular toilet. Whichever you choose, make sure your child can stabilize himself with his feet so he can push when he's having a bowel movement. You may also want to pick up an explanatory picture book or video for your child to help him get interested in training.

### C -- Create a routine

Sit your child fully clothed on the potty seat once a day -- after breakfast, before his bath, or whenever else he's likely to have a bowel movement. This allows him to get used to the potty and accept it as part of his routine. If he doesn't want to sit on it, that's okay. Never restrain him or physically force him to sit there. And especially don't push the issue if he seems scared.

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In both cases, it's better to put the potty away, or at least aside, for a few weeks or a month and then try again. If he's willing to sit there, fine. But at this stage, don't even try to explain why he should use it; you just want him to get used to the thing. Make sure it's always in a convenient place -- since it's portable, your child's potty can be used in the garden or the playroom.

#### D -- Ditch the diaper

Sit your child on the potty seat without a diaper. Again, let him get used to what it feels like to sit there this way. At this point you can start explaining that this is what Mommy and Daddy (and any older siblings) do every day. That is, undressing before you sit down to go to the bathroom is the grownup thing to do.

If he gets the idea and produces something, that's fine. But don't push him to perform. Again, wait until he's ready and demonstrates a clear interest in using the toilet on his own.

#### E -- Explain the process

It may help to show your child where his bowel movements go. The next time he goes in his diaper, take him to his potty, sit him down, and empty the diaper beneath him into the bowl. This will help him make the connection between sitting and producing. After you've emptied his potty into the big toilet, let him flush it if he wants to (but don't make him do it if he's scared) so he can see where it goes. Teach him to dress himself and wash his hands when he's done.

#### F -- Foster independence

Encourage your child to use his potty whenever he feels the urge to go. But make sure he knows that he can tell you, too, and that you'll take him to the bathroom whenever he wants you to. If you can, let him run around sometimes without a diaper (or any clothing below the waist), with the potty nearby. Tell him he can use it whenever he wants to and remind him occasionally that it's there if he needs it.

## G -- Grab some training pants

You may like to try using training pants. Some children like them and they help, others just think of them as a slightly different type of diaper and they defeat the object of the exercise. Some children are encouraged by having real underwear instead.

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## H -- Handle setbacks gracefully

Virtually every child will have several accidents before being completely trained during the day and at night. Don't get angry or punish your child; after all, it's only recently that his muscles have developed sufficiently to allow him to hold his bladder and rectum closed at all. Mastering the process will take time. When he has an accident, calmly clean it up and suggest that next time he try using his potty instead.

## I -- Introduce night training

Even when your child is consistently clean and dry all day, it may take him several more months or years to master night training, so don't throw away his diapers just yet. At this age, his body is still too immature to reliably wake him up in the middle of the night just to go to the bathroom. You can help cut down on wet nights by not letting him drink too much before bedtime and telling him that if he does wake up in the middle of the night he can call to you to help him get to the potty. You can also try leaving his potty near the bed in case he wants to use it.

## J -- Jump for joy -- you're done!

Believe it or not, when your child is ready to learn this new grown-up skill, he will. And if you wait until he's really ready to start, the process shouldn't be too painful for either of you. He will eventually be trained, and you won't have to think about it again -- at least, not until the next baby...

## Toileting Readiness Checklist

You don't have to wait until you've checked off every item to start training. Just look for a general trend toward independence and an understanding of what it means to go to the bathroom like a grown-up.

### Physical signs

- ☐ Is coordinated enough to walk, and even run, steadily.
- ☐ Urinates a fair amount at one time.
- ☐ Has regular, well-formed bowel movements at relatively predictable times.
- ☐ Has "dry" periods of at least three or four hours, which shows that his bladder muscles are developed enough to hold urine.

### Behavioral signs

- ☐ Can sit down quietly in one position for two to five minutes.
- ☐ Can pull his pants up and down.
- ☐ Dislikes the feeling of wearing a wet or dirty diaper.
- ☐ Shows interest in others' bathroom habits (wants to watch you go to the bathroom or wear underwear)
- ☐ Gives a physical or verbal sign when he's having a bowel movement such as grunting, squatting, or telling you
- ☐ Demonstrates a desire for independence.
- ☐ Takes pride in his accomplishments.
- ☐ Isn't resistant to learning to use the toilet.
- ☐ Is in a generally cooperative stage, not a negative or contrary one.

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## Cognitive signs

- ☐ Can follow simple instructions, such as "go get the toy."
- ☐ Understands the value of putting things where they belong.
- ☐ Has words for urine and stool.
- ☐ Understands the physical signals that mean he has to go and can tell you before it happens or even hold it until he has time to get to the potty.

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## Charting Your Child's Toileting Patterns

It may be helpful to know your child's toileting habits before starting a toileting program. Using a toileting chart helps to keep track of when he is wet or has bowel movements. When using a chart, keep the following in mind:

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- ✓ Begin to keep track 1 or 2 weeks before actually starting the toileting program.
  - ✓ Check your child's diaper and mark down on the chart if it is dry or not.
  - ✓ Use the key at the bottom of the chart.
  - ✓ Use the chart to note any regular patterns in your child's toileting habits.
  - ✓ If no patterns are found, increase your child's fluid intake so he empties his bladder more often
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**KEY** **D** = Dry    **W** = Wet    **BM** = Bowel Movement    **T** = Went in Toilet

TIME OF DAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY`

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