

Toilet Training



What is toilet training?

Toilet training is teaching your child to recognize their body signals for urinating and having a bowel movement. It also means teaching your child to use a potty chair or toilet correctly and at the appropriate times.

When should toilet training start?

Toilet training should start when your child shows signs that they are ready. There is no right age to begin. If you try to toilet train before your child is ready, it can be a battle for both you and your child. The ability to control bowel and bladder muscles comes with correct growth and development.

Children develop at different rates. A child younger than 12 months has no control over bladder or bowel movements. There is very little control between 12 and 18 months. Most children don't have bowel and bladder control until 24 to 30 months. The average age for toilet training is 27 months.

Learning when my child is ready to start toilet training

These may be signs that your child is ready to start toilet training. Your child should be able to:

- Walk well in order to get to the potty chair
- Tell you when there is a need to go to the potty
- Control the muscles used for going to the potty

Other signs that your child may be ready for toilet training include:

- Asks to have the diaper changed or tells you a bowel movement or urine is coming
- Shows discomfort when the diaper is wet or dirty
- Enjoys copying what parents or older children do
- Follows you into the bathroom to see how the toilet is used
- Wants to do things (such as going to the potty) to make parents happy or to get praise
- Has dry diapers for at least 2 hours during the day or is dry after naps or overnight

Getting started with toilet training

These tips may help you get started with toilet training:

- If there are siblings, ask them to let the younger child see you praising them for using the toilet.
- It's best to use a potty chair on the floor rather than putting the child on the toilet for training. The potty chair is more secure for most children. Their feet reach the floor and there is no fear of falling off. If you decide to use a seat that goes over the toilet, use a footrest for your child's feet.
- Let your child play with the potty. They can sit on it with clothes on and later with diapers off. This way they can get used to it.
- Never strap your child to the potty chair. Children should be free to get off the potty when they want.

- Your child should not sit on the potty for more than 5 minutes. Sometimes children have a bowel movement just after the diaper is back on because the diaper feels normal. Don't get upset or punish your child. You can try taking the dirty diaper off and putting the bowel movement in the potty with your child watching you. This may help your child understand that you want the bowel movement in the potty.
- If your child has a normal time for bowel movements (such as after a meal), take your child to the potty at that time of day. If your child acts a certain way when having a bowel movement (such as stooping, getting quiet, going to the corner), try taking your child to the potty when they show it is time.
- If your child wants to sit on the potty, stay next to your child and talk or read a book.
- It's good to use words for what your child is doing (such as potty, pee, or poop). Then your child learns the words to tell you. Remember that other people will hear these words. Don't use words that will offend, confuse, or embarrass others or your child.
- Don't use words such as dirty, naughty, or stinky to describe bowel movements and urine. Use a simple, matter-of-fact tone.
- If your child gets off the potty before urinating or passing a bowel movement, be calm. Don't scold. Try again later. If your child successfully uses the potty, give plenty of praise, such as a smile, clap, or hug.
- Children learn from copying adults and other children. It may help if your child sits on the potty chair while you are using the toilet.
- Children often follow parents into the bathroom. This may be one time they are willing to use the potty.
- Start out by teaching boys to sit down for passing urine. At first, it is hard to control starting and stopping while standing. Boys will try to stand to urinate when they see other boys standing.
- Some children learn by pretending to teach a doll to go potty. Get a doll that has a hole in its mouth and diaper area. Your child can feed and "teach" the doll to pull down its pants and use the potty. Make this teaching fun for your child.
- Make going to the potty a part of your child's daily routine. Do this first thing in the morning, after meals and naps, and before going to bed.

After training is started

The following tips may help you once the training is started:

- Once your child starts using the potty and can tell you they need to go, taking them to the potty at regular times or reminding them too many times to go to the potty isn't needed.
- You may want to start using training pants. Wearing underpants is a sign of growing up, and most children like being a "big kid." Wearing diapers once potty training has been started may be confusing for your child.
- If your child has an accident while in training pants, don't punish them. Be calm and clean up without making a fuss about it.
- Keep praising or rewarding your child every step of the way. Do this for pulling down pants, for sitting on the potty, and for using the potty. If you show that you are pleased when your child urinates or has bowel movements in the potty, your child is more likely to use the potty next time.
- As children get older, they can learn to wipe themselves and wash hands after going to the bathroom. Girls should be taught to wipe from front to back so that germs from bowel movements aren't wiped into the urinary area.
- Remember that every child is different and learns toilet training at their own pace. If things are going poorly with toilet training, it's better to put diapers back on for a few weeks and try again later. In general, have a calm, unhurried approach to toilet training.
- Most children have bowel control and daytime urine control by age 3 or 4. Soiling or daytime wetting after this age should be discussed with your child's healthcare provider.

- Nighttime control often comes much later than daytime control. Complete nighttime control may not happen until your child is 4 or 5 years old, or even older. If your child is age 5 or older and doesn't stay dry at night, you should discuss this with your child's healthcare provider.
- Even when children are toilet trained, they may have some normal accidents (when excited or playing a lot), or setbacks due to illness or emotional situations. If accidents or setbacks happen, be patient. Examples of emotional situations include moving to a new house, a family illness or death, or a new baby in the house. In fact, if you know an emotional situation is going to be happening soon, don't start toilet training. Wait for a calmer time.

Books, videos, and more information on toilet training can be found at the library, bookstore, or online. Talk with your child's healthcare provider for more information.

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