



## Praise and Reward Your Child's Success

"My daughter, Tara, used her potty the very first day we brought it home," reports her mother, Anita. "I thought we had it made as far as toilet training went—but then she refused to go near the potty for the next two weeks. I already had her in underwear, so I spent the entire two weeks cleaning up after her accidents. That wasn't exactly what I'd planned."

Your child's mastery of the potty, as with other developmental tasks, is a gradual progression, beginning with not being able to eliminate, through being able to eliminate but not consistently, to total mastery. It should not come as a surprise when initial successes on the potty are followed by setbacks or regression. While success on the potty is the most effective reinforcing teaching tool available, the time it takes for this lesson to sink in varies widely.

Some children adjust to potty use almost immediately and continue to use the potty with few accidents. Most, however, repeat their successes only sporadically for the first few days, weeks, or even months, gradually increasing potty use as they enjoy the parental praise and feelings of independence that accompany it.

After your child has successfully used the potty several times at your suggestion, try hanging back a bit to see if she will respond to the urge to use the potty on her own. It's all right to verbally prompt her occasionally—particularly at times when she usually needs to eliminate or if her behavior indicates she needs to go (dancing around, clutching her genital area, squatting). But don't *constantly* ask if she has to go to the bathroom, since such behavior will rob her of her sense of control and cause her to resist.

When a mistake happens, treat it lightly and try not to get upset. Focus instead on keeping her meals and naps on a regular schedule, asking her after each naptime and meal if she needs to go, and feeding her plenty of fruits, other foods high in fiber, and liquids. This will make her body's urges more predictable and she will then be more likely to respond to them.

When your child does respond to her urge by going to the potty, managing her clothes, and successfully eliminating, continue to praise her every time. Again, a treat in exchange for each potty use may motivate her to keep trying, as long as the treat is not so big that it distracts from the act itself.

Most parents find that adding potty use to a list of chores or achievements (such as laying out the napkins for dinner, feeding the fish, or brushing her teeth) and letting the child add a star or sticker next to each chore accomplished enhances her feelings of pride while placing toilet training in the proper context of just another life skill that must be mastered.

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**Source** Guide to Toilet Training (Copyright © 2003 American Academy of Pediatrics)

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