

## Toilet Training

### “Isn’t she toilet trained yet?”

Nothing irritates parents quite like this statement. It implies a judgement on their child and their parenting ability. It is also an invasion of a child’s privacy. Either point that out, or ignore the comment, but do not let it affect how you and your child go about the business of toilet training.



### When is a Child Ready?

There is no set age for toilet training. Toilet training will only happen when your child wants it to, and is developmentally capable. Most children are ready for toilet training between two and three years of age, and use the toilet consistently and successfully around age three. Staying dry at night takes longer, sometimes up to six years of age. Toddlers around two years old are often very much into ‘no-no-no’ behaviour. This is a phase that it is best to get past before you bring up the idea of toilet training.

They must also be ready in terms of their physical development. For example, if your child does not appear to notice that she’s having a bowel movement and is perfectly content sitting in a wet or soiled diaper, she’s not ready. However, if just before she has a bowel movement she gets a ‘look’ on her face, she is showing that she knows that something is happening in her body.

If just before he urinates he clutches at his penis, then shows great interest in the puddle he’s produced, he is showing an awareness that something is happening in his body. Another sign of readiness is that the child’s diaper now stays dry for long periods of time, and is often dry after waking from a nap. Awareness doesn’t necessarily mean that they can control it yet, but it is the first step in that process.

The final step in readiness is an ability to communicate. Your child should be able to follow simple directions and communicate basic needs, such as “I’m hungry,” or “Come to the bathroom.”

Remember that toilet training is not about the parent being sensitive to their child’s body, and then popping them on the potty ‘in time’. Toilet training is the child learning to:

- Recognize when she is about to urinate or have a bowel movement;
- Communicate what is about to happen and seek your help if necessary; and
- Control that urge until he gets seated on the potty.

Your child is *ready* for toilet training when he or she is:

1. *Willing*;
2. *Physically capable* of controlling elimination; and
3. Able to *communicate* and ask for help.

Do not pressure your child in any way. Keep the bathroom a battle-free zone and stay calm. They’re learning a new skill and it takes time. Like all of us, toddlers have good days when they feel strong and capable, while on other days, things are more challenging.

### Introduce the Idea

Buy a potty chair and put it in the bathroom next to the toilet. Explain, “When you are a big girl you will want to use the potty just like Mom or Dad uses the toilet.” Keep it low pressure. If she is still into ‘no-no-no’ behaviour she will reject this idea. That tells you she is not ready.

When she shows some interest, if you are comfortable, invite her to join you on the toilet (child with clothes on). Sit reading a magazine - offer her a favourite book to look at. You are teaching her to relax and let nature take its course. Do not push her. If she resists, back off. Let her come to you and show interest again.

At some point he will want to sit on the potty just like you. This idea of wanting to be big is a great motivator for independently minded toddlers. Children with older siblings or those in daycare situations often train themselves.

Children are often fascinated by their own feces. The child has discovered that this feces comes out of him. It is part of him and he may be hurt if you show disgust. Children are also often frightened by a flushing toilet so be sensitive to this when you empty the potty. Strange toilets often spook young children. Pack the potty along until they are comfortable in strange bathrooms.

## Bladder Training

Although some children learn to control both bowel movements and urination at the same time, controlling urination is harder. If your toddler can't seem to get this, he probably just doesn't have the necessary physical development yet. Be patient and keep the diapers on!

Talk about it and keep the potty handy. It is a very short time at first, from the time she feels the urge to urinate, until the time she must urinate. As she gets better at recognizing the physical sensations that precede urination and as her muscular control increases with her physical development, this will get easier, but it takes time. Keep clothes simple and quick to pull off.

Be sensitive though, to the child who is willing and eager but just doesn't have the necessary physical development yet. It's not good for children to fail repeatedly at anything, so try to keep training low key and lighthearted. Once they are showing some ability to make it to the potty on time, take them shopping to choose their new underwear. This is a great motivator for children because once they've spent enough time in these they don't usually want to return to bulky diapers.

Children differ in their willingness to give up diapers. Some children will feel more secure wearing them at night for a long time after they routinely stay dry. Others are so sure of themselves that they refuse to wear them after a week of success. This is related to their readiness for this accomplishment.

Most young children are so motivated to be big that they make a natural transition to the toilet. Make sure there is a stable stool available and that you are there to help them balance for the first few times.

Encourage good wiping hygiene, teaching girls to wipe from front to back to prevent infections of the bladder or vagina.

Encourage his successes and focus your praise on the 'act' rather than on him being 'good'. Use comments such as "Great that you had a pee on the potty!" rather than "Good boy." And remember, being able to use the toilet at an early age has no bearing on how smart or capable he is.

## Regression

During the first year, bowel and bladder training are easily disrupted. Changes such as, moving to a new house, starting playschool, or especially, experiencing the arrival of a new baby, can send a trained toddler back to their diapers. Stay calm and low key. Always carry a spare set of clothes and never punish accidents. With this kind of acceptance your child will willingly return to trained status as soon as she's adjusted to whatever changes are disrupting her life. Call your health care professional if your child does not use the toilet during the day by age four, or continues to soil his or her pants after age five.

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