

Toilet training your child: The basics

Your child is toilet trained when without any reminders, he (or she, of course) walks to the potty, pulls down his pants, urinates or passes a bowel movement (BM), and pulls up his pants. Some children learn to control their bladder first; others start with bowel control. You and your child can work on both kinds of control at the same time. Bladder control through the night normally happens several years later than daytime control. The gradual type of toilet training described in this Guide usually can be completed in one to three months - if your child is ready.

Toilet training readiness

Don't begin toilet training until your child is clearly ready! Readiness doesn't just happen; it involves concepts and skills you can begin teaching your child at 18 months of age or earlier. Almost all children can be ready for toilet training by 3 years, most by 2 1/2 years, many by 2 years and some earlier. Ways to help your child become ready include the following:

18 months. Begin teaching about pee, poop, and how the body works.

- Teach the vocabulary (pee, poop, potty).
- Explain to your child that everyone makes pee and poop.
- Point out when dogs or other animals are doing pee or poop.
- Clarify the body's signals when you observe them: "your body wants to make some pee or poop."
- Praise your child for passing poop in a diaper.
- Don't refer to poop as "dirty" or yucky."
- Make diaper changes pleasant for your child so she will come to you.
- Change your child often so she will prefer a dry diaper.
- Teach her to come to you when she is wet or soiled.

21 months. Begin teaching about the potty and toilet.

- Teach what the toilet and potty chair are for ("the pee or poop goes in this special place"). Demonstrate by dumping poop from diapers into the toilet.
- Portray using the toilet and potty chair as a privilege.
- Have your child observe toilet-trained children use the toilet or potty chair (an older toilet-trained sibling can be very helpful.)
- Give your child a potty chair. Encourage your child to sit on it with clothes on for fun activities, such as play, snacks, and watching television. Help your child develop a sense of ownership ("my chair").
- Put the potty chair in the bathroom and have your child sit on it when you sit on the toilet.

2 years. Begin using teaching aids.

- Read toilet learning books and watch toilet learning videos with your child.
- Help your child pretend to train a doll or stuffed animal to use the potty chair. It doesn't have to be an expensive doll that pees water.
- Introduce wearing underwear as a privilege. Buy special underwear and keep it in a place where your child can see it.

The potty chair

Buy a floor-level potty chair. You want your child's feet to touch the floor when he sits on the potty. This provides leverage for pushing and a sense of security. It also allows him to get on and off whenever he wants to. Take your child with you to buy the potty chair. Make it clear that this is his own special chair. Have him help you put his name on it. Allow him to decorate it or even paint it a different color.

Then have your child sit on the potty chair fully clothed until he is comfortable with using it as a chair. Have him use it while eating snacks, playing games, or looking at books. Keep it in the room in which your child usually plays. Never proceed with toilet training unless your child clearly has good feelings toward the potty chair.