

Toilet Training - Normal

Definition

Your goal is to toilet train your child. Your child will be toilet trained when without reminders they can:

- Walk to the potty
- Pull down their pants
- Pass urine or a bowel movement (BM) into the potty
- Pull up their pants.
- This handout discusses a gradual type of toilet training.

Health Information

Bladder and Bowel Control

- Some children will learn to control their bladder first. Others will start with bowel control. Both kinds of control can be worked on at the same time.
- Bedwetting is different. Bladder control through the night normally happens several years later than daytime bladder control.
- Most toilet training can be completed in 1 to 2 months. However, your child needs to be ready before you start.

Toilet Readiness Training

- Don't begin toilet training (prompted potty sits) until your child is clearly ready. Readiness doesn't just happen.
- Toilet readiness training means teaching your child about pee, poop and use of the potty (and toilets). This special teaching can start at 18 months of age or earlier.
- Details on how to help children become ready are found in the handout, "Toilet Readiness Training".

How to Know if Your Child is Ready to Start Real Toilet Training

- Your child knows the sensation of a full bladder and full rectum. Hiding to go pee or poop proves they recognize this urge and can wait briefly.
- Can go 2 or more hours without passing urine. Waking dry from naps is a good sign.
- Poops are formed and passed 3 or less times per day.
- Comes to you to be changed to a clean diaper.
- Your child knows what the toilet and potty chair are used for.
- Your child likes to sit on the potty chair.
- Your child likes to please you and is cooperative with most verbal requests.

- 1. Start Practice Runs to the Potty:**
 - A practice run (potty sit) is encouraging your child to sit on their potty chair with their diapers off.
 - Only do practice runs when your child gives a signal that looks promising. Such signals are a certain facial expression, holding the genital area, or pulling at their pants. You may notice pacing, squatting, dancing in place or even grunting.
 - If you don't see any signals, other good times for practice runs are after naps or 2 hours without passing urine. You can also try 20 or 30 minutes after meals or a big drink. Tell your child, "Your poop (or pee) wants to come out. Let's sit on the potty".
 - How often: Try to limit practice sits to no more than 5 times per day. Too many reminders turns some children against the process. Having a limit also will help you be better at figuring out the best times and signals.
- 2. Make Practice Runs Positive for the Child**
 - Keep them upbeat and fun.
 - If your child doesn't want to sit on the potty, let it go at that time.
 - If your child wants to get up after 1 minute of encouragement, let him get up.
 - Caution: Never force your child to sit there. Never physically hold your child there. This is the main cause of toilet training resistance.
 - Don't read to or play games with your child while sitting on the potty. That confuses the purpose of why they are there. Leave them focus only on making their body do its job.
 - Even if your child seems to be enjoying it, end each session by 5 minutes.
 - This is not the time to teach proper wiping and handwashing. Be sure that any wiping is gentle. Keep the focus on releasing pee and poop into the potty.
- 3. Keep a Potty Chair Close By:**
 - Initially, keep the potty chair in the room where your child usually plays.
 - This easy access increases the chances that they'll use it without you asking.
 - Consider owning 2 potty chairs, so one can be in your bathroom.
- 4. Wear Clothing That is Easy to Remove:**
 - During toilet training, children need to wear only one layer of clothing. That usually means training pants or pullups.
 - Some parents find it is helpful to keep their child in diapers until they start toilet training. Switching to pullups at that time can motivate your child to keep them clean and dry. Teach them how to pull them down.
 - Avoid shoes and outer pants.
 - In the wintertime, if needed, also wear loose sweatpants.
 - After toilet training is done, avoid any pants with zippers, buttons, snaps, or a belt for a while.
- 5. Praise Your Child for Cooperation and Any Success:**
 - In the beginning, praise your child's cooperation with practice sits.
 - For example, you might say, "You are sitting on the potty just like Mommy." or, "You're trying real hard to go pee-pee in the potty".
 - Eventually give praise and hugs mainly for passing urine or stool into the potty.
 - A sense of accomplishment is enough for some children. However, some need rewards to stay focused. Examples are stickers or healthy food treats.
 - Big rewards like going to a toy store for a prize should be reserved for big steps. For instance, your child has completed toilet training.
 - Caution: Overpraising can make some kids feel pressured. Keep your praise more natural and selective.

6. **Practice Runs - When to Stop Prompting:**

- Once your child starts using the potty by themselves several times in a row, you can stop practice runs.
- For the following week, continue to praise your child frequently for using the potty.
- Phase them out gradually. Prompt only when your child ignores an obvious signal.

7. **Change Your Child Calmly After Accidents:**

- Change your child as soon as it's convenient. Respond with kindness. Say, "You wanted to go pee in the potty, but you went in your pants. I know that makes you sad. You like to be dry. You'll get better at this."
- If you feel a need to express disapproval, do so rarely. For example, "Big boys don't go poop in their pants." Or mention the name of another child whom your child likes and who is trained.
- Change your child into a dry diaper or training pants in a pleasant manner.
- Try not to show your anger. Carefully avoid any physical punishment, yelling, or scolding.
- Pressure or force will start a power struggle. Your child may become completely uncooperative.

8. **Regular Underwear - When to Start:**

- Introduce regular underwear after your child starts using the potty on their own.
- Regular underwear can spark motivation.
- Switch from training pants or pullups to regular underwear after your child passes urine into the potty on their own for a whole day.
- Buy loose-fitting underwear that they can easily lower and pull up on their own.
- Once in underwear, use diapers or pullups only for sleep and long travels outside the home.

9. **What to Expect**

- Some kids are easy to train, others are harder.
- Practice runs and reminders should not be needed for more than 1 or 2 months.
- If there is no progress, your child probably needs a break for a few months.
- Facts: the average age for completing toilet training in the US is 2 years and 6 months. The average age is younger in other countries.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child is over 2 1/2 years old and has a negative attitude about toilet training
- Your child is over 3 years old and not daytime toilet trained
- Your child won't sit on the potty chair or toilet
- Your child holds back bowel movements
- The approach described here isn't working after 3 months
- Note: See Toilet Training Resistance handout

Pediatric Care Advice

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