
Preparing Your Child to Use the Toilet

Helping children learn to use the toilet can be one of the most frustrating aspects of parenting a toddler. Friends and relatives may be pressuring you to start training your child. You may be wondering if the need to change your child's diapers will ever end.

A few key suggestions will help reduce your stress and frustration. First, understand that children don't develop the muscle coordination to control their bowels and bladders until 22-24 months of age. Research shows most children won't stay dry and clean much before this age.



Don't aggravate yourself by encouraging your child to use the toilet before he shows an interest himself and is physically ready. If children are pressured to use the toilet before they are physically and intellectually able, they will suffer unavoidable accidents. Embarrassment combined with parental disapproval increases children's sense of shame and undermines their sense of independence.

Please remember each child is different. Some children begin using the toilet before age two. Others begin much later. Don't force your toddler to use the potty. These signs suggest your child is getting ready to use the toilet:

- She can grasp a small object between her thumb and forefinger. This shows she is developing control over various muscles, including bowel and bladder muscles.
- He uses words for urinating and bowel movements. He lets you know he has wet his pants or that he needs to use the potty.
- She consistently lets you know she's wet or wants her diaper changed.
- He is aware of a full bladder and the urge to have a bowel movement. He may pace, jump up and down, or pull at his pants or genitals.
- She can dress and undress herself. Learning to use the toilet will be easier when she can do these tasks for herself.
- He is dry for periods of two or more hours at a time. If he isn't dry for this length of time, he isn't physically ready to use the toilet.

Some parents place children younger than 24 months on the toilet during the time when they often have a bowel movement. This procedure may "train" the parents but rarely works for children. The baby or toddler doesn't understand why he or she is on a potty and usually doesn't cooperate.

Often the child gets angry and tired of being placed "in the right place at the right time." This practice can frustrate both parents and children. Here are some ways parents can prepare toddlers to use the toilet:

- Help him learn to dress and undress. Give him a chance to try it himself.
- Allow her to watch you or her siblings using the toilet. She'll soon realize this is the grown-up and expected way to urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Let your child flush the toilet. He'll learn the toilet is nothing to be afraid of, even if it is loud, and that it typically gets flushed after someone eliminates.
- Don't scold your child if she pulls off her diaper and plays with her bowel movement. This is normal, natural behavior. Calmly explain the stool goes in the toilet and is flushed away.
- Help your child wash her hands after using the toilet.
- Get a doll that wets and show your child how "dolly goes to the potty."
- Let your child practice sitting on the potty with clothes on to get a feel for it.
- When your child begins to show signs of being ready to use the potty, you may want to say something like, "You'll be more comfortable playing in these underpants than in those bulky diapers. If you need to urinate, here is the potty."

Around 24 months of age, your child will learn to control his bladder. Often, he will be able to delay the flow of urine long enough to find a potty or toilet. He will do this, however, only if he is interested and the toilet is close to him.

Prepare for the many times your child won't make it to the potty. Don't get upset when she urinates on the floor! Realize this is the "mopping up" stage and it will pass. Play it safe and keep diapers on for public outings and bedtime. If your child insists on going diaperless, take along a change of clothing in case of accidents when you're away from home.

Be sure to show approval when your toddler is successful using the toilet. It is also extremely important not to scold your child when she has an accident. This could lower her self-esteem and may discourage her from using the potty or toilet.

Don't show your disgust at feces. Your child's bowel movement is something he has created. If you show disgust he may think that you're disgusted with him. He may feel proud of his feces and even want to show them off! He may be upset when you flush away his creation. This is normal behavior. Simply praise him for being such a big boy and flush when he's not around. Remember:

- Don't force your child to sit on the potty.
- Tone down your reactions. Don't shame your child for accidents and don't show disgust with his urine or feces.
- Your child has a natural bowel pattern. Don't use laxatives or anything to upset her system.
- Above all, stay calm. Don't worry, your child won't start elementary school in a diaper! With your gentle encouragement and your child's need for independence, he or she will learn to use the toilet.

Sources:

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