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## Potty Training: Learning to the Use the Toilet



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## Key Takeaways

- There is not one “right” way or one “right” age to start potty training.
- Look for signs that a child is ready to begin potty training
- Know when it is not a good time to start potty training
- Ensure all caregivers create a supportive environment for success

## Signs a Child is Ready for Potty Training

**When and how to help a child learn to use the potty depends on how ready the child is, as well as each family's own beliefs and values about toilet training.**

Most children develop control over their bowel and bladder by 18 months. This skill is necessary for children to physically be able to use the toilet. How ready a child is emotionally to begin learning to use the potty depends on the individual child. Some children are ready at 18 months, and others are ready at 3. While every child is different, about 22% of children are out of diapers by 2½, and 88% of children are out of diapers by 3½.

**A child is ready to learn to use the toilet when they:**

- Stay dry for at least 2 hours at a time, or after naps
- Recognize they are urinating or having a bowel movement. For example, a child might go into another room or under the table when they have a bowel movement. This is important—if the child does not realize they are having a bowel movement, she won't be successful at potty training.
- Develop physical skills that are critical to potty training—the ability to walk, to pull pants up and down, and to get onto/off the potty (with some help).
- Copy a caregiver's toileting behavior.
- Can follow simple instructions.
- Wants to use the potty. They may tell you they to wear “big boy” underpants or learn to go potty “like Daddy does.” They may feel uncomfortable in a soiled diaper and ask to be changed or ask to use the toilet themselves.

## When Not to Start Potty Training

**Knowing when not to start potty training is just as important as knowing when to start. There are some issues that can sometimes get in the way of success.**

when children are going through a significant change or several changes at once it might be smart to hold off on adventures in potty training. At these times, children often feel overwhelmed and sometimes lose skills they have already learned or were making progress on, like potty training.

If a child is in the middle of potty training during a stressful time and seems to be having more accidents than usual, know that this is normal. The child needs all of your patience and support right now and will return to their previous level of potty training once things have gotten back to normal.

**Common situations that can cause stress and are generally not good times to start training include:**

- An upcoming or recent family move
- Beginning new or changing existing child care arrangements
- Switching from crib to bed
- When you are expecting or have recently had a new baby.
- A major illness, a recent death, or some other family crisis



## Starting Potty Training

**It can be helpful to think of potty training as a process in which both you and your child have your own “jobs” to do.**

**It is a parent and caregivers’ responsibility to create a supportive learning environment. This means they:**

- Recognize the child is in control of his or her body
- Let the child decide whether to use the potty or a diaper/pull-up each day
- Teach the child words for body parts, urine, and bowel movements
- Offer the child the tools she needs to be successful at toileting (such as a small potty, potty seat, stool, etc.)
- Expect and handle potty accidents without anger
- Avoid punishment as well as too much praise around toilet use. (This can make children feel bad when they aren't successful.)

**It is the child's responsibility to:**

- Decide whether to use the toilet or a diaper/pull-up
- Learn their body's signals for when they need to use the toilet
- Use the toilet at their own speed

**Browse all resources on early childhood development.**

