



# Toilet Training

There are three things you can't make your child do . . . **eat, sleep, or go the bathroom.**

**Toilet training is a learning process**, not a disciplinary process. Trying to toilet train before the child is **ready, physically and emotionally**, will only mean failure. Assume that any neighbour, relative or friend who claims victory in toilet training her child before yours is probably exaggerating or a fantasy. The older the toddler is, the quicker he will learn. Parents often rush toilet training because they feel once their child is trained they are a 'successful' parent. Some parents also believe that a child that is trained early is more intelligent. Your child's readiness for toilet training is no indication of his or her I.Q. Children learn to use the potty just as they learn to do everything else, at their own rate.

Do not start toilet training until both you and your child are ready. It may take up to 3 months to train your child. It is not uncommon for a child 2½–3 years of age to still be wearing diapers. Most children cannot regulate their muscle control until 18 months to 3 years of age. Children begin to have control of their sphincter and bladder between 18–24 months. Some medical problems may delay a child from developing the muscle control needed for self-regulation. Girls sometimes achieve control before boys.

## When NOT to Try Toilet Training

If a child is experiencing a stressful situation (weaning from the breast or bottle, birth of a new baby, changes in childcare, moving, etc.) do not attempt toilet training. Wait 4–6 weeks after the stressful time before beginning toilet training. You may also find that your child regresses (or falls back) when you are toilet training and a stressful event occurs.

## Pre-Toilet Training`

- Naming urine and bowel movements.
- Watch you and other family members use the toilet.
- Wanting the diaper changed as soon as possible after it becomes wet or dirty. When you change the diaper, NEVER make your child feel bad for wetting or soiling it. If possible, change the diaper in the

bathroom. This allows you to drop the discards from the diaper into the toilet and permits the child to flush the toilet. Your child will learn where the 'poopoo' goes.

- Praise your child when they tell you or gestures that they have gone 'peepee or poopoo'.

## Readiness Checklist for Toilet Training

- Is 18 months to 3 years of age
- Is over the excitement of learning to run and walk
- Can express and understand one-word statements ('wet', 'dirty', 'potty', 'go')
- Able to sit down and play quietly for 5 minutes
- Able to help dress and undress self, able to pull pants up and down
- Imitates behaviour
- Wants to put toys and other possessions where they belong
- Able to understand and follow simple directions
- Takes pride in accomplishments
- Has bowel movement at regular times every day
- Bowel movements are well formed
- Able to remain dry for 2 hours at a time
- Dry after a nap (1–2 hours)
- Able to urinate a good amount at one time
- Aware of the process of elimination
- Has a name for urine and bowel movement

## Toilet Training Steps

Once your child has given you many readiness signals, spend at least one week in the pre-toilet training phase. Then begin toilet training. There are 7 steps to toilet training. Make sure your child feels comfortable and has mastered each step before moving onto the next.

### Step # 1

Keep a list of when your child urinates or has a bowel movement. This will help you identify an elimination pattern. (Do step #1 as you do step #2 and step #3).

### Step # 2

Casually introduce your child to the potty. Put potty in the bathroom and allow the child to ask about it. This allows the child to be the initiator and in control

### Step # 3

Have your child sit on the potty several times a day with clothes on. This will get the child in the habit of sitting on the potty in a non-stressful manner. Allow the child to do a special activity while sitting on the potty. This special activity should be reserved for potty time only. Play the activity with your child so that your child doesn't become tense and bored.

### Step # 4

Encourage your child to sit on the potty several times a day with pants and diaper off. The goal is for the child to feel comfortable sitting on the potty, skin against plastic. A good time to put your child on the potty is close to the time your child would normally urinate or have a bowel movement. Try your child at bath time because the clothes are already off. If your child urinates or has a bowel movement while on the potty give lots of encouragement and praise.

### Step # 5

For a block of time each day, leave your child's diaper and pants off. This will help your child learn that 'peepee or poopoo' comes from them. Try at least 30-minute blocks of time. Accidents may occur so be careful where you let your child wander. When you remove my diaper remind me that big boys and big girls go in the potty. Praise me if I try to go on the potty. Clean up accidents in a positive way, don't punish. Stay at this step until your child has at least 10 successes.

### Step # 6

Move me into training pants and then underwear. It may take a couple of months of training before I can go a few days without having an accident. When I can do this, let me wear underwear.

### Step # 7

Now it is time for me to do it. Let me push down my pants and underwear, get on the toilet, get the right amount of toilet paper, wipe from front to back, put the toilet paper in the toilet, get off, pull up my underwear and pants, flush and wash with soap and dry hands.

### The mastery of skills usually follows a pattern

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- first, **bowel control**
- then **daytime bladder control**
- and finally, (often much later)
- **night time bladder control**

*Developed from the following:*

*American Academy of Family Physicians resources*

*Dr. Brenda Hussey-Gardner resources*

*Vicki Lansky's book*



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