

Toddlers and Toilet Training

On average, most children begin learning to use a potty by around their second birthday, but, as with everything in children's development, each child is different.

Up to the age of 20 months, toddlers' bladders empty often, making it difficult for them to master bladder control. In addition, clothing is still tricky to manage.

Some parents find it easier to toilet train their children during the summer, when toddlers can run around with fewer clothes on. If this isn't the right time for your child, however, don't worry. Always go with your toddler's readiness.

It can take longer for boys to learn, especially as they also have to master weeing while standing up. Most boys learn to go sitting down first. Dad, mum or an older brother can then show them how to do it the other way.

Is your child ready?

Your child may be ready to start trying to use the toilet if he:

- Stays dry for a couple of hours each day
- Takes an interest when you, your partner or older siblings go to the toilet
- Has bowel movements at regular times of the day, say, after breakfast
- Can demonstrate when a bowel movement is taking place, by squatting or making a grunting sound for example
- Lets you know he wants to be changed when his diaper is soiled

When to wait

It's usually best not to start toilet training your child during times of stress, such as:

- The arrival of a new baby in the family
- Starting a new childcare arrangement
- Moving from a cot to a bed
- Moving house
- Family relationship problems
- When a family member is ill

Potty pointers

- Be positive and upbeat - present the change from diapers as something exciting.
- Give lots of praise whenever your child manages to do a poo on the potty - stress how grown up and clever it is.
- Don't rush things - sometimes if you start teaching later it takes less time, and older children can skip the potty stage and move straight to using the toilet.
- Expect setbacks - learning to use the toilet is just like other skills your toddler learns and you didn't expect him to learn to walk without a lot of falls.
- Give your toddler clothes that can be pulled down or up easily - you may also want him to wear training pants at first, to cope with those inevitable accidents.
- Never force your child to sit on the potty, this will only upset him and won't make the process any faster.
- Some toddlers enjoy picking out their own potty and toilet seat.
- Many toddlers are afraid of the sound of the toilet flushing or don't like to see the poo being flushed away - just wait until he has run off to play and then flush.
- It always takes longer for a child to learn to stay dry at night - when he starts having the occasional dry nappy in the morning, it's a good sign the time is right to try going without a nappy.
- Do your best not to be angry with your child if he has an accident - just say, cheerfully, "never mind, you'll get there next time, let's get you some dry pants".
- Remember to get your toddler to wash their hands afterwards, so that using the potty or toilet is associated with hand washing from the word go.