

Toilet training

Using the toilet is an important step in your toddler's life. Some toddlers get the knack quickly, while others need parental patience and support.

Don't start toilet training too early. Children are generally around two years of age before they can recognise and respond to toileting signals such as a full bladder. Premature toilet training will only frustrate you and upset your child because they can't do what you ask of them.

Don't get stressed

Try to keep a relaxed attitude. Toileting is not a reflection on your parenting. If you treat toileting as a matter of discipline and punish your child for accidents, you are starting a fight you can't win. You will delay toilet training by making your child unhappy and anxious about going to the toilet.

How to tell when your child is ready

Your child will show certain signs when they're ready to start toilet training, including:

- **Age** – your child needs to be between 18 months and three years before they are mature enough to recognise the urge to use the toilet.
- **Interest** – your child expresses curiosity in watching others go to the toilet. Although this might seem embarrassing at first, it's actually helpful to the child if they can see parents or older siblings using the toilet.
- **Dryness** – their nappy stays dry for up to two hours, showing they are able to store urine in the bladder. For example, their nappy may be dry when they wake up from their afternoon nap.
- **Nappy issues** – they may tell you they hate wearing nappies, or else try to take them off themselves, particularly after soiling them.
- **Awareness** – your child can tell you they're pooing or weeing while they're doing it, or can tell you straight after. If they can tell you before it happens, they are definitely ready for toilet training.
- **Attention** – they have the ability to sit in one position for two to five minutes.

Potty versus toilet

You have to decide whether you want your child to use the toilet or a potty. Issues to consider include:

- Some children are scared of falling into the toilet, so a potty might be best.
- Potties can be used in any room in the house and can be taken on car trips.
- A child who exclusively uses a potty may be too afraid to use any toilet, which can make outings difficult unless you take the potty with you.
- If your child is using the toilet, you'll need to buy a step and a smaller seat that fits securely inside the existing toilet seat.
- Some parents encourage their child to use both the toilet and potty.

Preparation for toilet training

Suggestions include:

- Choose the toileting words you're going to use – for example poo, wee, pee and so on.

- Start talking to your child about going to the toilet. It may help to talk about what you're doing on the toilet while your curious toddler watches.
- Tell them they won't have to wear nappies any more if they go to the toilet. For some toddlers who are sick of wearing nappies, this may be all the motivation they need.
- If your child will be using a potty, encourage them to sit on it whenever you're sitting on the toilet.
- Work out the procedure together and make sure your child understands. For example, you might say: 'When you need to go to the toilet, come and tell me and I'll help you'.

Start training when your child shows signs of being ready

Suggestions include:

- Stop using nappies during the daytime and put your child in underpants. Continue to use a nappy for daytime sleeps.
- Dress them in clothes they can easily manage – for example, trousers with elasticised waistbands instead of buttons and zips. In warmer weather, consider leaving them bare-bottomed at home.
- Give a gentle reminder at regular intervals throughout the day to see if they need to go to the toilet, but don't nag.
- Don't make them sit on the toilet or potty for long periods of time, because this will feel like punishment.
- You will need to wipe their bottoms for them at first.
- Teach them to wash their hands every time they go to the toilet. Use a special soap just for these occasions.
- If your child is showing the ready signs, they will connect quite quickly. However, they may continue to have accidents at various times. Don't lose patience or heart.
- If they refuse to use the toilet or potty, don't force them. Leave it until they are willing to try again.
- If one week goes by without any success, postpone all attempts and try again a few weeks later. Remember it is not a race or a test.
- Praise success. You could try rewards like an animal stamp on their hand. Reduce the praise as the skills are mastered.
- Be casual about accidents – take an 'oh well, it doesn't matter' attitude.
- Don't try at stressful times, such as when you have a new baby.

Toileting accidents

Suggestions include:

- Expect accidents. Your child has been wearing nappies their whole life and remembering to use the toilet will take practice.
- Toddlers can't hold on for too long. At first they may only have enough time to tell you they need to go to the toilet before they wet their pants.
- Give your child credit for trying, even when they don't make it to the toilet in time. Praise them for telling you they needed to go or for pulling their pants down.
- Your child may become upset or discouraged by accidents. Reassure them that accidents don't matter and that it takes time and practice to master toileting.

Coping with setbacks

Sometimes toilet training is two steps forward and one step back. Your child may seem to have mastered toileting, only to regress. Life events or changes in routine, such as a new baby sibling or an illness, are common triggers. Suggestions include:

- Don't get angry. Your child isn't deliberately trying to annoy you. Avoid any sort of punishment, such as making them clean up their own mess. Stay calm and positive.
- Your child may be feeling too pressured to succeed. Forget about toilet training for a week or two, and give them time to relax.
- Make sure your child feels supported in their efforts to master toileting.
- It may help to try and make toileting 'fun' for a while. For example, you might sing songs together or read a book to them while they're sitting on the toilet, but don't overdo it.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Parent Line Tel. 132 289
- Maternal and Child Health Line, Victoria (24 hours) Tel. 132 229

Things to remember

- Your child needs to be between the ages of 18 months and three years before they are mature enough to recognise the urge to go to the toilet.
- Keep in mind that toilet training is a new skill for your child to learn.
- Praise every little success and remain calm about accidents.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tweddle Child and Family Health Services

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