

Thoughts on Toilet Training

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You think it might be time for your child to take the big step from diapers to undies, and you're hoping for a smooth transition. Maybe you've already started the process and would like a little support. Or you've tried and it didn't happen – yet. Don't worry – your child will not still be wearing diapers as an adult! As with many parenting tasks, it helps to have a good sense of humor, a friend or two to trade stories with, and a little information.

How will you know when your child is ready? There isn't one magic age or formula. In fact there may be any combination of readiness factors. You know your child better than anyone else. Take your cues from them. They may express interest in wearing underwear, show curiosity about the toilet, start talking about going "potty", or report when they've wet their diaper or had a bowel movement. Your child has a better chance for success at potty training if they have some ability to recognize their body's "signs" that they have to go, when they have some ability to exercise control over their bodily functions, and when they can communicate the need to you – in short, when they can be actively involved. When you think there are enough of the variables in place for your child, give it a try!

Whether your child is eighteen months or three years old, they need your support and encouragement. Set them up for success! Help them figure out how to negotiate the bathroom. Show them how to pull down their pants, pull up their underwear, sit on the potty, pull up their pants. Dress them in clothing that makes the process easy. Help them when they need it, and practice, practice, practice. Be enthusiastic in your support! "Nice job putting your poop in the potty!" "It looks like you need to go pee. Let's go to the bathroom." "You're good at sitting on the potty!" Allow them to take ownership of it. "I did it!" "I'm wearing big-boy undies!" Let them announce it to the important people in their life.

It also helps to normalize the whole process. "Everybody pees. Everybody poops." Decide on the words you'll use – pee, poop, BM, potty – and use them consistently to avoid misunderstanding. Establish a routine. Begin with your child's existing patterns – before naptime, after mealtime, before getting in the car – and listen to your child. When they say they have to go – get them to the bathroom. If they're lost in play, remind them that they can return to it after they go to the bathroom. Let your child know that you didn't always know how to do this either! But you've had a lot of practice, and now you're really good at it!

Give your child permission to have accidents because they will happen. This is often more of an issue with parents and caregivers than with the child. But it's to be expected and it's really okay. There should be no punishment involved. Learning to control their bodily functions and use the toilet are new skills that your child is working to master! When an accident happens, be matter-of-fact. Stay calm and be reassuring. "That's okay, honey. Let's clean up and get you some fresh underwear." And make sure to keep spare clothes on hand.

Some children practically train themselves. One day they tell you, "I want to use the potty" and they never look back. Others make the transition over time. If your child is having a tough time of it – try again later, maybe a few weeks, maybe a couple of months. You want your child to feel successful rather than frustrated. Every child is unique and will be ready in his or her own time.

Sources: [What to Expect: the Toddler Years](#), Eisenberg, Murkoff, and Hathaway; *Potty Training: how to get the job done*, Mayo Clinic Staff;