



Potty Training Tips

Potty training is a big deal. Here's what you need to know about timing, technique and handling the inevitable accidents.

Potty training has more to do with physical and emotional readiness, not a specific age.

Is it time?

- Does your child seem interested in the potty chair or toilet, or in wearing underwear?
- Can your child understand and follow basic directions?
- Can your child ask simple questions?
- Does your child stay dry for periods of two hours or longer during the day?
- Does he or she wake from naps dry?
- Does your child have fairly predictable bowel movements?
- Does your child tell you when he or she needs to potty or poop?
- Is your child uncomfortable in wet or dirty diapers?
- Can your child pull down his or her pants and pull them up again?

When you decide it's time to begin potty training, set your child up for success. Start by maintaining a sense of humor and a positive attitude. Then:

Pull out the equipment. Place a potty chair in the bathroom. You may want to try a model with a removable top that can be placed directly on the toilet when your child is ready. Encourage your child to sit on the potty chair — with or without a diaper. Make sure your child's feet rest firmly on the floor or a stool. As your child checks out the potty chair, help him or her learn how to talk about using the bathroom. Use simple, correct terms. Let your child see you and other family members using the toilet.

Schedule potty breaks. If your child is interested, have him or her sit on the potty chair or toilet without a diaper for a few minutes several times a day. Read a potty-training book or give your child a special toy to use while getting used to the potty chair or toilet. Stay with your child when he or she is in the bathroom. Even if your child simply sits there, offer praise for trying — and remind your child that he or she can try again later.



Get there — fast! When you notice signs that your child may need to use the toilet — such as squirming, squatting or holding the genital area — respond quickly. Help your child become familiar with these signals, stop what he or she is doing and head to the toilet. Praise your child for telling you when he or she has to go. When it's time to flush, let your child do the honors. Also remember the importance of good hygiene. Teach girls to wipe carefully from front to back to prevent bringing germs from the rectum to the vagina or bladder. Make sure both boys and girls learn to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Consider incentives. Some kids respond to stickers or stars on a chart. For others, trips to the park or extra bedtime stories are effective. Experiment to find out what works best for your child. Reinforce your child's effort with verbal praise, such as, "How exciting! You're learning to use the toilet just like big kids do!" Be positive even if a trip to the toilet isn't successful.

Be consistent. Make sure all of your child's caregivers — including babysitters, child care providers and grandparents — follow your potty-training routine.

Ditch the diapers. After several weeks of successful potty breaks, your child may be ready to trade diapers for training pants or regular underwear. Take time to celebrate this transition. Go on a special "big kid" outing. Call close friends or loved ones and let your child spread the news. Once your child is wearing training pants or regular underwear, be careful to avoid overalls, belts, leotards or other items that could hinder quick undressing. Once you switch to training pants or regular underwear, do not go back to diapers or pull ups (during the daytime). This will only confuse your child.

Treat mistakes lightly. Accidents are inevitable, and are part of the learning process. Experiencing accidents is how your child will master remembering to use the toilet in the future. When it happens, stay calm. Simply say, "Uh-oh. You had an accident. Let's change you. Pretty soon you'll remember to use the potty chair every time you have to go."

Sleep soundly. Most children master daytime bladder control within three to six months of starting potty training. Nighttime control may take months — or years — longer. In the meantime, you may want to use disposable training pants when your child sleeps.



Know when to call it quits. If your child resists using the potty chair or toilet or simply doesn't get the hang of it, take a break. Chances are, he or she simply isn't ready yet. Try it again in a few months. If your child isn't interested in potty training by age 3, you might ask your child's doctor for suggestions.

Accidents will happen

You may breathe easier once your child learns how to use the toilet, but expect occasional accidents and near misses. Here's help handling — and preventing — wet pants.

Stay calm. Kids don't have accidents to irritate their parents. Don't add to the embarrassment by scolding or disciplining your child. You may say, "You forgot this time. Next time you'll get to the bathroom sooner."

Slow down. Remind your child to relax and take it slow. Completely emptying the bladder can help prevent accidents.

Offer reminders. Accidents often happen when kids are absorbed in activities that — for the moment — are more interesting than using the toilet. To fight this phenomenon, suggest regular bathroom trips, such as first thing in the morning, after each meal and snack, and before getting in the car or going to bed. Point out telltale signs of holding it, such as fidgeting or holding the genital area.

Be prepared. If your child has frequent accidents, absorbent underwear may be best. Keep a change of underwear and clothing handy, especially at school or in child care.

When to seek medical advice

Occasional accidents are harmless, but they can lead to teasing, embarrassment and alienation from peers. If your potty-trained child reverts or loses ground — especially at age 4 or older — or you're concerned about your child's accidents, contact his or her doctor. Sometimes wetting problems indicate an underlying physical condition, such as a urinary tract infection or an overactive bladder. Prompt treatment can help your child become accident-free.