

Toddlers and Toilets

Learning to use a toilet can't be rushed. It's important to wait until your child is both physically ready (muscles that control the bowel and bladder have to be strong enough) and motivated to learn. This way, toilet teaching takes less time and is less frustrating and disappointing for you and your toddler.

Most children are at least 2-1/2 years old before they are physically ready to learn how to use the toilet. Even then, they also need to be interested. Give yourself and your child lots of time and avoid deadlines.

Below are signs that toddlers may be ready for this important developmental step:

- stays dry for several hours or through the night
- has bowel movements at fairly predictable times
- can tell when they're urinating or having a bowel movement
- can pull down loose-fitting pants and follow simple directions
- doesn't like to be in wet or soiled diapers
- can say they need to use the toilet
- shows interest in using the potty or in other people using the toilet

Start Slowly

Time and patience are the keys to toilet training. Begin by helping your toddler recognize when he is "going". Talk to your toddler using words that are familiar to your family.

Let your toddler see you use the toilet. When you have to go to the bathroom, interrupt your activities and let him know where you are going. You can also let him see you emptying the contents of his soiled diapers into the toilet and then flushing so he can understand where bowel movements should go. These things help toddlers develop the thinking process they need to successfully use the toilet.

Set up a potty chair in the bathroom and explain what it's for. Let him approach it on his own time. Reading books about toilet training is another way to get your child used to using the toilet. Local libraries carry a good selection of children's books on toilet teaching and other toddler-related subjects.

Simple Steps

Learning to use the toilet is a complex task for children. Breaking the task down into simple steps will help your child's progress over a period of days or weeks.

- Begin by showing your child his potty and explaining how it's used. Let him know you'll help him.
- Ask your child to tell you when he needs to go to the toilet. Watch for signs he is about to go. He will likely stop what he's doing, look down or off in the distance, or say, "Oh, oh". He may also fidget or hold his hand between his legs. If you ask him if he has to go, he will likely say "No!" If you say "Looks like you have to go to the bathroom", or "Let's get you to the bathroom", you may get faster action. Your toddler probably won't be able to wait more than a few moments.
- Stay with your child while he is on the toilet.
- Little boys may want to pee standing up like their dad or other boys and men. It is easier, however, for them to learn by sitting first, then switch to standing when they know what to do.
- Encourage your child's effort, successful or otherwise. Get him into the habit of washing his hands whenever he has been in the bathroom.

- If after a couple of weeks your child is not making progress, he is likely not yet ready to learn. Stop and try again in a few weeks or when he seems more interested.

Take a Seat

Your toilet's seat may be too big – or even scary – for your toddler. A training potty that sits on the floor, or a toilet seat adapter that fits on your toilet, can make your toddler feel safer and more comfortable.

If you use a potty:

- Make sure it's sturdy and doesn't tip easily. Your child may feel safer because his feet are on the floor and he won't be afraid of falling in.
- Your child will quickly be able to get on and off without your help.
- Your child will be able to see his "results".

If you use a toilet-seat adapter:

- It should fit securely, otherwise it may pinch or your child may be afraid he is falling.
- Your child may be scared if the toilet is flushed while he is sitting on it. Many children this age fear being flushed down the toilet, or being sucked down the bathtub drain. Let him know he is too big for this to happen. Respect his fear by letting him flush the toilet once he is off.
- Use a step stool so your child can get on and off easily. To feel stable and secure, your child's feet should touch the stool when he is seated.

Set the Stage for Success

- Take your child to the toilet after waking up, before going out, after a nap, or before a bath.
- Keep the potty in a bathroom close to where he spends most of his day.
- Keep books in the bathroom to help your child sit longer.
- Keep the potty clean so your child will want to use it.
- Dress your toddler in clothes that are easy to pull up and down.
- The sound of running water may help the urge to pee.
- Be consistent. You and other adults need to have the same approach and expectations for your child to learn to use the toilet.
- Be patient, positive, and relaxed. Don't set deadlines. Children will learn in their own way and on their own time.

Oops!

Expect accidents. It takes time to learn this new skill. Toileting accidents are not something children do on purpose. Some children may begin to have more accidents if family life changes because of:

- a new baby
- interrupted routines
- new or different child care
- stress in the family
- illness or injury

Your child may feel bad about these lapses. Reassure him that this is part of learning and that he is loved and supported. A calm, matter-of-fact approach will help your child get back on track.