

Time For Toilet Training!

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Maybe, like me, you have received a call from a well meaning grandparent letting you know that children in Europe are toilet trained by age 1 or that your Aunt Mary's neighbor's daughter was toilet trained by age 18 months. Toilet training may seem like a fairly simple procedure until you are suddenly faced with having to toilet train your child. To add to parents' anxiety, there has been controversy in the media as to when to start toilet training. Experts disagree. Some state that "not having your child trained by age 2 is an insult to his or her intelligence." Others encourage parents to "let kids decide for themselves when to make the transition."

Given the views from experts and advice from family and friends, it's easy for parents to become overwhelmed in how to approach the potty training process. While the average age to introduce potty training is around 24 months, there is a large degree of individual difference about the age at which a child is toilet trained.

In order for toilet training to be successful, you must assess your child's readiness. Your child should be able to:

1. Remain dry for several hours-
2. Understand what the toilet is for,
3. Have a desire to control the impulse to urinate or defecate;
4. Have the ability to communicate needs verbally or with body language; and
5. Have the ability to understand simple instructions.

Children who are ready to be toilet trained typically have a regular pattern of urinating or defecating. A child who will not sit on the potty, even for treats, may not be ready. Try again in a month.

Toilet training is a complex learning process for your child. The child has to learn that defecating or urinating in diapers is no longer acceptable. The child must now learn to recognize a full bladder, tighten the sphincter muscle, stop an activity to go to the bathroom, and still leave enough time to get their clothes off, sit on potty, relax the sphincter muscle, urinate or defecate, wash hands, and then return to activity. Not surprisingly, this learning process will take time. It typically takes at least one to two months before the child is mostly dry. Some children continue to have accidents for as long as a year. It is best to start potty training when there aren't other stressors occurring (e.g., going out of town, new baby, visitors) and you are not working on another challenging behavior (e.g. sitting around the dinner table).

Although each child must be treated individually, these training tips can help make the training potty process successful:

Before starting training:

Determine when your child's bladder is normally full. This increases the success of toilet training by having your child use the potty when his or her bladder is usually full and helps the child to associate the feelings of full bladder or bowel with using the potty. Try to dedicate about a week where you are checking your child's diaper every half-hour. Record on a calendar with time intervals if your child is dry or wet. A pattern will likely be seen in 3 to 5 days. If you do not

see a pattern your child might not be ready to be trained. When you check your child's diaper if it is dry, make an enthusiastic remark about it being dry. If wet, do not act upset, just calmly say "oh wet, yuck."

After completing the pre-training diaper check, the official training will begin:

Be consistent with not using diapers except for naps and bedtime.

Dress your child in easy to remove clothing so that YOU can respond to his/her signals quickly and easily. It will also make it easier for your child to use the toilet independently.

The potty should be placed in the bathroom. If using the toilet, remember fear of failing in is common for children this age. Purchasing a toilet ring will help to decrease this fear. Also, providing support under your child's feet, such as a stool or stack of books will make them more comfortable.

Place your child on potty during times he or she was found to be wet or soiled on the pre-training chart; have child sit on potty for up to five minutes to help him/her learn to relax or get accustomed to sitting on the potty (it's okay for child to bring in a favorite book to make the time go by faster).

The use of a timer may also help the child know when its time to get off. Reward child for sitting on the potty (sticker, verbal praise). If your child does use the potty, make a BIG deal about it (reward child with a fancy sticker, treat etc.); and

Don't become upset or punish your child if he/she has an accident. Handle accidents matter-of-factly (e.g., Oops, you are wet).

Remember, this is a learning process for your child.

Additional strategies that will help with toilet training include talking with your child about the potty, having child practice sitting on potty with clothes on, and reading books with your child that shows other children using the potty. I purchased the videotape, "It's Potty Time" to review for this article. My 22-month old son was watching this tape with me, and based on his reaction, it definitely earns two thumbs up. The book, "Toilet Training in Less than a Day" by Drs. Fox and Azrin describes an intensive training procedure, with step-by-step instructions. However, this procedure works best for children above age three who are fairly compliant.

Some children are easier to train than others. If toilet training seems to be a battle, hang in there, be positive and be patient.

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