

700 Children's Drive
Columbus, Ohio 43205-2696
nationwidechildrens.org

TOILET TRAINING

Parents often ask, "What is the best age to start toilet training?" Toilet training is a skill that is taught and mastered at different times by different children. There is no "best age" for all children to begin toilet training.

Some children are ready to begin toilet training at 18 months. Other children are not ready until 2 years of age or older. (The average age is about 2 years for girls and 2½ years for boys.) Some things that might slow down a child's readiness for toilet training are: childhood illnesses, family crisis, language delays, a new baby in the family, or fear of the toilet.

The best time to start toilet training is when your child can do **all** of these things:

- Stands and walks by himself.
- Can control the sphincter (SFINK-ter) muscles of the rectum and urinary opening.
- Recognizes the urge to have a bowel movement or to urinate and can delay the urge.
- Can give a "cue" when he feels the need to "go potty." The parent or caregiver must be able to understand that cue.
- Can follow basic directions.

GAINING YOUR CHILD'S COOPERATION

- It is helpful to look upon toilet training as a time of learning for your child. Like learning new words or learning to stack blocks, it takes time for your child to master what he has learned.
- The best way to gain cooperation is to praise your child when he is successful and be kind and understanding when he is not.
- Harsh words and spanking should **never** be used when he fails because that may make him feel ashamed. It will not help and will only cause delay in the training.

LEARNING THE WORDS

Before you can begin toilet training, there have to be words or cues to use. Choose the word you want to use, then start teaching your child to use it. For example, each time your child has a bowel movement (BM) in his diaper, you might say, "Sammy's going poo-poo" or whatever word you use. Repeat the same word each time you change his diaper. Soon the toddler will start to say a word that sounds like BM to himself and to you. After he is able to say the word and knows what it means, he may be able to tell you he wants to go to the bathroom.



Picture 1 "Your new potty is just right."

CUES THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE READY FOR TOILET TRAINING

Many people who have had children feel they are "experts" in toilet training. Some will advise you to start earlier. Since all children are different in the way they grow and develop, you should follow **your** child's "cues" for readiness and start the training when **your** child is ready. If your child keeps wetting his pants, becomes frustrated, or does not seem ready, stop the toilet training and try again in a few months. Usually children become completely toilet trained between the ages of 2 and 3½. If your child is toilet trained before he is 2, he may "backslide" and start wetting his pants again before he is totally trained.

Some children prefer to give signals, or cues, when they need to "potty" instead of using words. These are some examples of cues:

- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- Child stays dry for longer than 2 hours or does not wet his diaper during naps.
- Brings you a clean diaper when his is soiled or wet and wants you to change him.
- Takes off a soiled or wet diaper himself.
- Pulls at your clothes to let you know his diaper needs to be changed.
- Talks about using the potty and wearing "grown-up" underwear.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT POTTY CHAIR

Many types of potty-chairs are available. The chair should be low enough for your child to place his feet firmly on the floor (Picture 1, page 1). The chair should have back support and arm rests so that your child will feel secure and not be afraid of falling.

LEARNING TO USE THE POTTY

- Take your child to the potty each time he tells you he wants to go or signals that he is ready. Taking him to his potty while you use the toilet can help him get used to the routine. Stay with him each time if he seems afraid that you might leave him. Gradually, he will be content to stay alone.
- Dress your child in loose-fitting pants and training pants.
- Since your child is beginning to want his independence, let him help. You might begin by having him tear off the toilet paper. Later, he may want to stand and pull up his own pants.
- Consider having regular sitting times to make it more of a routine.
- The training will be easier if you remember that "accidents" may happen and you stay calm when they do.
- When you feel your child wants to sit on the regular toilet, let him try it once in a while, but stay with him. This will help avoid the fear of strange toilets when you are away from home without a potty chair.
- Do not flush the toilet while your child is sitting on it. Toddlers don't know that their body is larger than the drain hole and may be afraid they will fall in. If your child uses a regular toilet, put a footstool in front of the toilet so the child can put his feet on it. This makes having bowel movements easier.



HABITS OF CLEANLINESS

- Teach your child to wash her hands each time after using the potty (Picture 2).

Picture 2 Teach your child to wash her hands after using the potty.

HABITS OF CLEANLINESS Continued

- Empty the potty into the toilet after each use. Wash the potty with a household disinfecting cleaner such as Lysol®, rinse, and dry it with paper towels. Store all cleaning supplies out of children's reach.
- Children who are learning to use the toilet often put their hands on the toilet seat to brace themselves. To stop the spread of germs, it is important to wash the toilet seat and bowl with a disinfectant several times a week.

REWARDS

Your child will learn faster if you reward him when he is successful in using the potty. Some examples of rewards are:

- Draw happy faces or use stickers on the clown chart (see page 4).
- Keep a few of your child's toys in a box where your child cannot reach them. When he has a success, give him a toy he has not seen for awhile to play with.



Picture 3 Reward your child when he is successful.

OTHER TIPS

- Your child should not be given toys to play with while sitting on the potty chair. Toys can distract him from learning to use the potty.
- Your child is a very active and busy little person. It is hard for him to "stay put" in one place very long. For this reason, do not expect him to sit on the potty chair longer than a few minutes each time.
- At this age, children like to copy what others do. It may help to let your child see other children use the potty or toilet. He may try to imitate them. A boy may learn to stand up to urinate by copying his father or an older brother.
- At first, your child may not stay dry all night, so you will want to use diapers at bedtime. It may help to waken your child once during the night to use the potty.
- Wearing "big boy" or "big girl" pants is often important to a child. Your child should be able to pull these pants on and off easily.
- Do not punish your child if he has an accident.
- Be sure to keep potty time a relaxing time. Encourage child to "just let come out" rather than "push" or "try". A child who tries to push may actually be tightening the sphincter, making it ever more difficult to have a bowel movement.

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR DURING TOILET TRAINING

- Some young children try too hard to please their parents and become fearful that they will have accidents. This may cause problems in other areas of their development. For example, your child may seem to be doing well with the potty training, but will start refusing food or will not stay in his own bed.
- If these things happen, you should suspect that the training has become "too much" for your child. You might try stopping the training for a week or so and see if the new problem goes away. If the problem remains, try easing up on the training or giving more praise when your child is successful.
- If your child goes to a babysitter or day care center, it is helpful if the same daily potty training routines are carried out there.

GOOD FOR ME

