

Potty Training: How to Start

Ages (18 Months – 4 Years)

Introduction

Potty training is a major milestone and a big step for children and parents. Timing, technique and handling accidents are essential. Potty training success hinges on physical, developmental and behavioral milestones, not age. It's so easy to get hung up and worried that your child's a certain age and not there yet, which adds so much pressure and turns it into a battle. Is your child showing an interest in the bathroom, telling you when they have to go, or wanting to be changed promptly after pooping? Try not to get frustrated if things are taking a long time. Potty training can take up to a year.

When are kids ready to potty train?

Many children show signs of being ready for potty training between ages 18 and 24 months. However, others might not be ready until they're 3 years old. Boys often start later and take longer to learn to use the potty than girls. There's no rush. If you start too early, it might take longer to train your child.

Is your child ready? Ask yourself: Can my child?

- follow simple instructions?
- understand and use words about using the potty?
- make the connection between the urge to pee or poop and using the potty?
- keep a diaper dry for 2 hours or more?
- get to the potty, sit on it for enough time, and then get off the potty?
- pull down diapers, disposable training pants, or underpants?
- show an interest in using the potty or wearing underpants?



If you answered mostly yes, your child might be ready. If you answered mostly no, you might want to wait.

There are some times when you may want to put off starting toilet training, such as:

- when traveling
- around the birth of a sibling
- changing from the crib to the bed
- moving to a new house
- when your child is sick (especially if [diarrhea](#) is a factor)



Your readiness is important, too. Let your child's motivation, instead of your eagerness, lead the process. Try not to equate potty training success or difficulty with your child's intelligence or stubbornness. Also, keep in mind that accidents are inevitable and punishment has no role in the process. Plan toilet training for when you or a caregiver can devote the time and energy to be consistent on a daily basis for a few months.

When it's time to begin potty training: How to Start

Choose your words:

- Decide which words you're going to use for your child's bodily fluids.
- Avoid negative words, such as dirty or stinky.
- Use words to express the act of using the toilet ("pee," "poop," and "potty").

Prepare the equipment:

Place a potty chair in the bathroom or, initially, wherever your child is spending most of his or her time. Encourage your child to sit on the potty chair in clothes to start out. Make sure your child's feet rest on the floor or a stool. Use simple, positive terms to talk about the toilet. You might dump the contents of a dirty diaper into the potty chair and toilet to show their purpose. Have your child flush the toilet.



Potty types:

The two basic potty options are:

- A standalone, toddler-size potty chair with a bowl that can be emptied into the toilet.
- A toddler-size seat that can be placed on top of a toilet seat that will let your child feel more secure and not fear falling in. If you choose this, get a stepping stool so your child can reach the seat comfortably and feel supported while having a bowel movement.

Schedule potty breaks:

- Have your child sit on the potty chair or toilet without a diaper for a few minutes at two-hour intervals, as well as first thing in the morning and right after naps.
- It's usually best for boys to first learn to use the toilet sitting down before learning to pee standing up. For boys who feel awkward, or scared, about standing on a stool to pee in the toilet, a potty chair may be a better option.
- Stay with your child and read a book together or play with a toy while he or she sits.

POTTY TRAINING SCHEDULE CHART

	DAY 1	DAY 2
6:30AM		
8:30AM		
10:30AM		
12:30PM		
2:30PM		
4:30PM		
6:30PM		
8:30PM		

- Allow your child to get up if he or she wants.

Even if your child simply sits there, offer praise for trying and remind your child that he or she can try again later. Bring the potty chair with you when you're away from home with your child.

Modeling:

Show your child how *you* sit on the toilet and explain what you're doing (because your child learns by watching you). You also can have your child sit on the potty seat and watch while you (or a sibling) use the toilet.



Get there — Fast!

When you notice signs that your child might 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. Keep your child in loose, easy-to-remove clothing.

Explain hygiene:

Teach girls to wipe carefully from front to back to prevent bringing germs from the rectum to the vagina or bladder. Make sure your child washes his or her hands afterward.

Ditch the diapers:

After a couple of weeks of successful potty breaks and remaining dry during the day, your child might be ready to trade diapers for training pants or underwear. Celebrate the transition. Let your child return to diapers if he or she is unable to remain dry. Consider using a sticker or star chart for positive reinforcement.

If your child resists using the potty chair or toilet or isn't getting the hang of it within a few weeks, take a break. Chances are he or she isn't ready yet. Pushing your child when he or she isn't ready can lead to a frustrating power struggle. Try again in a few months.

Don't make your child sit on the toilet against his or her will.



Additional Details:

How Long Does Toilet Training Take?

Teaching a toddler to use the potty isn't an overnight task. It often takes between 3 and 6 months, but can take more or less time for some children. If you start too soon, the process tends to take longer. And it can take months to even years to master staying dry at night.

Accidents will happen

To handle accidents:

- **Stay calm.** Don't scold, discipline or shame your child. You might say, "You forgot this time. Next time you'll get to the bathroom sooner."
- **Be prepared.** Keep a change of underwear and clothing handy, especially at school or in child care.

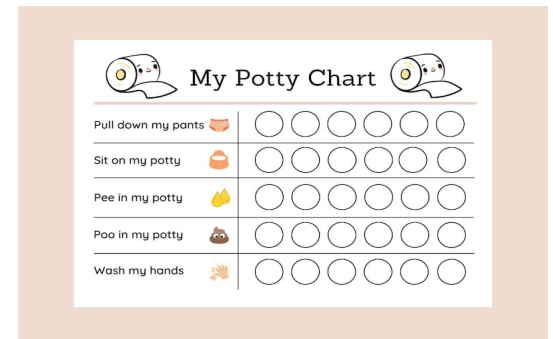


Nighttime training

Nap time and nighttime training typically takes longer to achieve. Most children can stay dry at night between ages 5 and 7. In the meantime, use disposable training pants and mattress covers when your child sleeps.

Rewards

Offer your child small rewards, such as stickers or time reading, every time your child goes in the potty. Keep a chart to track success. Once your little one appears to be mastering the use of the toilet, let him or her pick out a few new pairs of big-kid underwear to wear.



Trouble

If your child seems ready for potty training but is having difficulties, talk to your child's doctor. He or she can give you guidance and check to see if there's an underlying problem.

Additional Materials & Resources:

Websites:

Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/potty-training/art-20045230>

KidsHealth: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/toilet-teaching.html>

Books:

For Adults:

1. Oh Crap! Potty Training. Everything modern parents need to know to do it once and do it right. (Jamie Glowacki)
2. Mommy! I have to go potty! A parent's guide to toilet training. 2nd Edition. (Jan Faull M.Ed.).

For Children:

1. Potty (Leslie Patricelli)
2. Big girl panties (Fran Manushkin)
3. Potty Superhero: Get ready for big boy pants! (Parragon Books)
4. Once upon a potty (Alona Frankel)
5. Everyone poops (Taro Gomi)
6. My big girl potty (Joanna Cole)
7. Sam's potty (Barbro Lindgren).

Apps: Potty time, Daniel Tiger's stop and go potty, Potty time with Elmo, Perfect potty, Potty whiz.

References: Adapted from: www.mayoclinic.org (2021), www.parents.com (2022), www.kidshealth.org (2019).