

# Learning to use the toilet is an important step in your child's life.

But this can be a confusing time for families. Many parents wonder:

- When is my child ready for toilet teaching?
- What is the best way to teach my child?

While there is no one "right way" to teach children to use the toilet, the following ideas should be helpful to you.

## Is Your Child Ready?

Parents sometimes feel pressure to begin toilet teaching early.

Diapers are expensive, and some day care providers won't take children until they can use the toilet. Many of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers believed children should be toilet-trained very early, even before their first birthday. But today we understand that it's best to wait until children show signs that they are ready. Here's what to look for:

- Your child stays dry for at least a few hours.
- Your child can sit and walk well without help.
- Your child can follow simple directions, like pointing to body parts.
- Your child uses words and actions for going to the toilet.
- Your child wants to act like you and be a "big kid."

Parents often start toilet teaching when children are about 2 years old. If your child had a low birth weight or is developing slowly, you may want to wait until closer to age 3.



Books can also be very helpful. Check your library or local bookstore for these books with more information on toileting:

- *Toilet Learning: The Picture Book Technique for Children and Parents*, by A. Mack (Little Brown, 1978)
- *Toilet Training: A Practical Guide to Daytime and Nighttime Training*, by V. Lansky (Bantam, 1993)
- *Parents Book of Toilet Teaching*, by J. Cole (Ballantine, 1983)

Remember, your child is learning something new. It will take practice, and mistakes will happen. Be patient and encouraging. Your child will soon be more grown-up!

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C1339A

# Toilet Teaching: The First Steps



## These are the ages when children usually develop toilet skills:

- ◆ 15 months old Child may point to wet clothes.
- ◆ 18 to 20 months old Child may wet on the potty if placed there.
- ◆ 2 to 2½ years old Child may tell you “I need to go.”
- ◆ 3 to 4 years old Child can wait and can use the toilet alone.

## Are You Ready?

Are there major changes in your family, like an illness, a new baby, a new apartment, a new job, or a new sitter? If so, you may want to wait until things get back to normal. Do you have enough time? Toilet teaching needs a commitment of at least three months. Some children learn very fast, but others take longer.

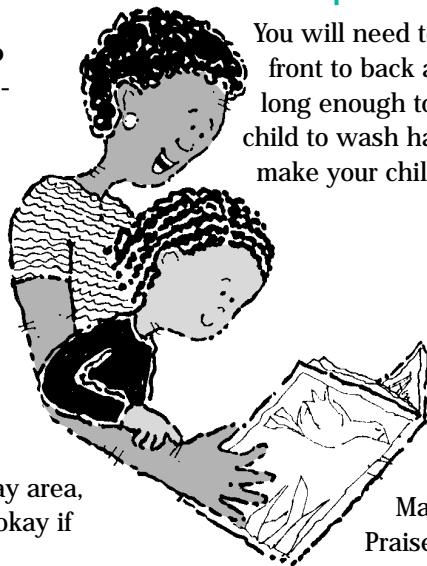
Sometimes parents feel pressure from family and friends to start toilet teaching early. There are many opinions, but remember that *you* are the one who knows the most about your child. Be sure to look for the signs that tell you your child is ready.

## Getting Started

Once you think your child is ready to begin, take some time to look at children’s books about using the toilet.

Reading them to your child will help him understand about getting started. Everyone in the family can be involved. Invite your child to watch you use the toilet. Older brothers and sisters can help by showing the younger ones how. Say to your child, “This is how big people use the toilet.” Be sure to include washing hands.

Have a potty chair near your child’s play area, where she can sit on it by herself. It’s okay if



she sits on it with her diaper on at first. During the day, encourage her to “play potty” with a teddy bear or doll (“Teddy go potty—Teddy’s a big boy”).

## Timing Is Everything

When your child seems to feel comfortable sitting on the potty, try asking him to sit without a diaper. Some important times to remember to make a “potty stop” are

- At the times your child usually has a bowel movement (BM)
- Right after a nap
- An hour after a drink or meal

## The Waiting Game

For a few days, not much will happen. Try asking your child to sit on the potty three or four times a day. Just two or three minutes is long enough. Stay and keep your child company. Use this time to talk about nice things, like a visit to Grandpa’s house or pictures in a storybook. Many children learn to have BMs in the potty before they learn to wet. It’s easier for children (and parents) to tell when this is going to happen. There’s also usually more time to get to the potty. One day, your child will “go” on the potty. When it happens, be ready to be excited and give a big hug.

## Clean-up

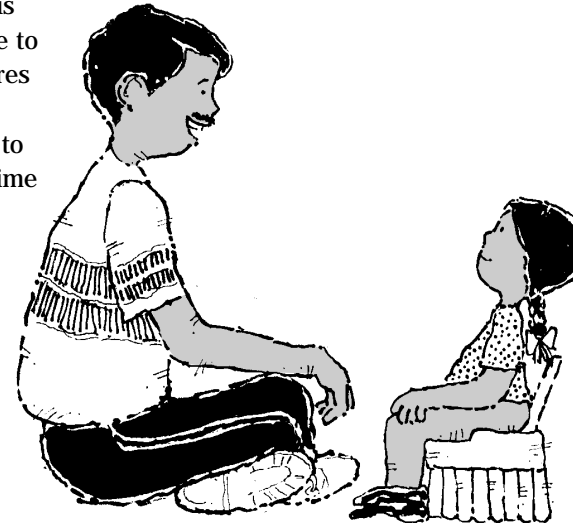
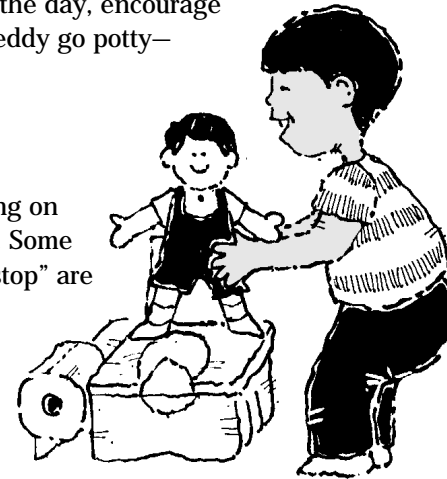
You will need to help your child learn to wipe from front to back after going potty. (Children’s arms aren’t long enough to do a good job.) Be sure to teach your child to wash hands with soap and water. Germs can make your child sick. Never give food in the bathroom.

## Don’t Fight About It

If your child doesn’t want to sit on the potty chair, just skip it. It can be difficult to have all the patience you need, so if your child puts up a big fuss, take a break. You may need to wait a few days or even a few weeks before you try again.

## Rewards and Punishments

Many parents wonder if they should reward or punish children during toilet teaching. Praise, hugs, and encouragement are important ways to help your child learn. If your child is uncooperative, don’t shame or punish. Don’t make fun of your child for having accidents.



All children have accidents and stubborn moods. When your child has an accident, say something like, “I’m sorry you had this accident.

I know you’re trying hard. Next time I bet you will get to the potty on time.”

People have different opinions about rewards like stickers or toys. They aren’t usually necessary. Remember, children want to be grown-up and to feel successful. They will usually work very hard for your approval.



## Naptime and Nighttime

Your child will be able to use the toilet in the daytime before staying dry during a nap or overnight. It could even be a year or more before your child stays dry most nights. You must decide whether to keep using diapers at night or to change the sheets when your child has an accident while sleeping.

## When and Where to Get Help

If you are having a lot of problems with toilet teaching, you may want to talk with someone who can help. If your child is 4½ or 5 years old and still hasn’t been successful, talk to your doctor. Your child may have a physical problem that is making toilet teaching difficult. But remember, many children are 3 or 4 years old before they can wait long enough to get to the toilet without having an accident.

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