

Toilet Training Your Toddler



Is my toddler ready for potty training?

Your mum probably claims you were toilet trained at nine months, but she also claims you were talking at five months and eating a full roast dinner at the tender age of six weeks, so don't fret unduly about your own incontinent tot. Here are the main signs your child may be ready.

They're old enough to have bladder control

Toilet training is much easier when children are aged two and upwards. Proper toilet training is virtually impossible for a child under 18 months because the sphincters (muscle outlets) of the bladder and bowel aren't yet under their control.

Bear in mind there's a wide variation in how quickly toddlers potty train, some of which is probably genetic. Lateness in acquiring bladder and bowel control runs in families and boys may take longer to get the hang of it than girls.

They have awareness that they're doing a poo or a wee

At around 18 months toddlers often know they're opening their bowels and stop playing for a moment - maybe standing still with a look of concentration. They might also tell you they've done a wee or poo and tug at their nappy or lie down in the 'change me now' position.

Another sign is if your child wees while her nappy is off and gazes with interest at the puddle and maybe clutches herself.

All these signals mean your toddler is starting to link effect with cause.

They're showing an interest in the potty or toilet

Your child has probably been accompanying mum and dad to the toilet for some time and may start indicating that he'd like a go at using the potty or toilet himself - sometimes when he feels he's about to do a poo.

Always encourage this role play, even if it doesn't produce anything. If it does, you will probably faint with shock, but try not to feel too victorious – this is just the start.



Preparing for potty training

If you think your toddler might be ready to give potty training a go, there are a couple of things to consider:

Is your child in good health?

There's no point starting potty training while your child is miserable with teething, or the day after you fed them that cut-price sushi from the supermarket. Start potty training when they're chirpy and in good health.

What time of year is it?

The best time to try potty training is in the summer months when your toddler can potter around the garden or uncherished rooms in your home without a nappy on. She can then see what she's producing. As can your visitors.

And nice sunny days mean your extra laundry and soggy rugs will be able to dry out more quickly. And you can open windows, should the need arise.

How long does potty training take?

Bowel control often comes before bladder control and children may be wet in the night for some time after they're dry during the day.

Toilet training is not something you can teach in a day - it may take weeks or months, with minor relapses if your child becomes troubled or ill. You may be lucky though - your toddler may step out of nappies within a couple of weeks and never look back.

Introducing a potty

Adult toilets can seem enormous to toddlers, who often worry they'll fall into them and get flushed away. Try not to encourage this phobia

What sort of potty you buy doesn't really matter. Quantity is a good idea though, so if you want to splash output potties in rooms all over the house. Time is of the essence and it's best not to have to waste it working out where you last saw the potty when wees are imminent.

Try a trainer seat over the big toilet seat when she's mastered the potty or if she's interested - but she might need a step to get up. Don't flush the toilet immediately she's finished (it can stoke her fears that she may get sucked in and disappear).

Of course, the toilet is not as convenient as a potty, so you may need to visit it rather frequently and certainly leave longer to get there

Introduce your toddler to the potty in a casual way, letting him or her play with it and role play with teddies or dolls. Don't let the first introduction be her bare bottom on to chilly plastic with your grim face peering nightmarishly from above.

It might be worth starting with a potty in the bathroom, and encouraging her to sit on it before a bath. This is a low-pressure introduction, not a full-blown preview. If she's not interested, you and the potty should back off.

Read some books on potty training with your toddler and discuss what's involved in potty training in simple terms.



Starting potty training

Explain what you're doing

Fully brief your child (pun intended). Make sure they know the plan. Tell them they're a big boy/girl and from now on they will do their wees and poos in the potty or toilet, and not in their nappy.

Buy them some nice big-girl or big-boy pants. Say you'll give them a sticker or a treat (NB: chocolate button rather than iPod) when they do their wees/poos in the potty/toilet. Stock up on pants, stickers, chocolate buttons and cleaning products.

Ditch the nappies

No nappies or pants is the order of the day once you start potty training. Your child will then feel the difference and start to associate going to the toilet with the big wet puddle she's standing in and the way mummy's descending with the kitchen roll.

Encourage regular potty visits

For the first day or two, sit her on her potty every half hour or so. Encourage her to use the potty after she's woken up - first thing in the morning for example (although this may not work if she usually wakes up feeling crabby).

Employ bribery

When your child manages to do a wee or poo in the potty, lavish them with praise and possibly a sticker or sweet. Chocolate buttons are a toddler favourite. Don't worry too much about using bribery. Once they've got the hang of training in a few days/weeks, you can drop the bribe and they usually don't notice.

Potty training diary

Day 1: We stayed in all day. Potty in the lounge. Sat him on the potty every 15 mins for five mins or so. If he did a wee while he was on the potty we would cheer and give him stickers etc. If he did a wee on the floor then we just said, "never mind, we'll get it in the potty next time and get a sticker". No pants or trousers, just naked bottom half all day.

Day 2: More of the same, with more wees on the potty than on the floor.

Day 3: Still stayed in all day but only sat him on the potty every two hours or so (I had worked out from the previous couple of days that he wees about every two hours). He mostly managed to hold it in for the whole two hours each time and then did it straight away when I asked him to sit on the potty.

Day 4: The same again, no accidents at all.

Day 5: Stopped reminding him every two hours. Said at the beginning of the day: "If you need a wee then ask mummy. Your potty is here. OK?" He had a few accidents.

Day 6: Same again but he got the hang of it without me reminding him and started asking to go." *2point4kids*



Reacting to accidents

Be prepared for lots of puddles, and never punish her for accidents. Just say "oops, next time let's try and make it to the potty" or something similar.

Be sympathetic about accidents and work on stressing the joys of no nappies rather than the delights of weeing in the potty. Don't make a drama out of wet pants - children, especially when they're older, are often ashamed enough already. Can't you remember

your bladder letting you down as a child? Or when you tried your friend's trampoline last summer?

During the early days, a tummy bug or a bout of diarrhoea is likely to lead to accidents. If your child can be kept home with diarrhoea then this is kinder for her. She'll probably be disgusted and upset.

You can reassure her this also happens to adults who have tummy bugs. This will probably make her even more disgusted and upset.

Don't imply toileting is disgusting

Most people aren't relaxed about their bodily functions - struggle not to pass your hang-ups on to your child. Phrases like "phwoar, you smell" will be counterproductive. Try to control your revulsion, even when scraping poo from the living room carpet.

Potty training out and about

Toddlers can't go 'just in case' before a long journey, so, inevitably, they'll want to go when you're travelling at 70mph along the motorway. Take a potty with you but don't risk life and limb to avoid a puddle in the car. One more reason to delay buying that Porsche.

[Trainer pants](#) may be worthwhile for trips out.

Always take changes of clothing - more than one. Children should have their clothes changed promptly - it's horrid to sit in soaked or soiled pants and illogical to think this will reinforce their need to go to the toilet.

Getting your toddler dry through the night

Don't rush trying to get your toddler dry through the night. Wait before you dispense with night-time nappies until daytime dryness has been comfortably achieved and she has had some (or all) nights in which the nappy is dry in the morning.

If your child isn't dry at night it's probably because their nervous system isn't mature enough to trigger a signal that their bladder is full and needs emptying.

Discuss with your child the issue of leaving nappies off at night and put a plastic sheet under the sheets. Be relaxed - reassure your child it doesn't matter if they wet the bed and that you can wash the sheets and change their pyjamas. Let them know they're bound to get the hang of it soon.

If your child continues to be wet at night after the age of six, visit your GP and contact [ERIC, the Children's Bladder and Bowel Charity](#).

One in 10 six-year-olds is regularly wet at night. Most grow out of it. Being wet at night runs in families and boys may be slower than girls to ditch the night-time nappy