



ABC of potty training

Approved by the Baby Centre Medical Advisory Board

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Potty training is one milestone that you're probably eagerly awaiting. Though some toddlers adjust in a few days, bear in mind that it may take your little one several months to get into the potty habit. And there will be setbacks along the way.

Assess your child's readiness for potty training

There's no right age to start potty training, as every child is different (Wu 2010). Parents usually think about training when their child is between 18 months and three years old. Most children are between two years and two-and-a-half years (Wu 2010) when they start (AAFP 2008, Choby and George 2008, ERIC 2010b). The older your child is, the easier and quicker it tends to be.

Don't feel pushed into toilet training your child too soon due to pressure from other parents or your family. Watch for the signs that your child is ready to start training, and don't start before then.

Talk to your toddler about what you are going to do, and decide what you're going to call wee and poo!

Make potty-training preparations

Go on a special trip with your child to buy some new pants and a potty. A potty is probably easiest to start with, rather than a toilet. It's easy to get on and off, and can be moved around the house (ERIC 2010a). However, you may want to buy a training seat to attach to your toilet.

If your child uses a toilet seat, you'll also need a footstep so your child can stabilise himself with his feet and push when he's having a poo. It will also allow him to get on and off the loo independently. You could show your toddler a fun picture book or DVD about using the potty, to get him interested in what's to come.

You could try using training pants for your toddler instead of, or as well as, proper underwear. Cloth training pants are similar to regular pants, but have an absorbent pad inside to cope with small accidents.

Absorbent, disposable pull-up trainer pants are especially easy to pull up and down. Some parents find these convenient, but some don't find them helpful, as they don't

feel very different from a nappy. Wearing real underwear may encourage your toddler to use his potty. You could let him choose some pants which have his favourite cartoon character on them.

Be consistent in your approach to potty training

Take things slowly to begin with. Encourage your toddler to sit on the potty once a day. This may be after breakfast, before his bath, or whenever he's likely to have a poo (DH 2009).

Sit your child on the potty after he has just had a wet or dirty nappy. This reinforces where the wee and poo is meant to go and encourages him to get used to the potty and accept it as part of his routine.

If he doesn't want to sit on it, that's fine. Never restrain him or force him to sit there. And don't push the issue if he seems scared. If he's not interested, just put a nappy back on him and put the potty aside for a few weeks before trying again (DH 2009). At this stage, you just want him to get used to the potty.

If he shows an interest, start explaining that this is what Mummy and Daddy, and any older siblings, do every day. Say that undressing before you sit down to go to the loo is the grown up thing to do.

If he gets the idea and manages to poo, that's great. But don't push him to perform. Wait until he's ready and demonstrates a clear interest in using the toilet on his own. If you persist when your child is not ready, he'll get upset and you'll become increasingly frustrated, turning toilet training into a battle-ground.

You may find that it's easier to potty train in the summer, when there are fewer clothes to take off, and washing dries faster. Make sure the potty is always in a convenient place. Being portable, the potty can be used in the garden, or whichever room you're in.

Let everyone who looks after your child know that you're going to start potty training. Grandparents, nursery staff or childminders all need to use the same, consistent approach (ERIC 2010a).

Demonstrate how it's done

Children learn by copying. Seeing you use the toilet will help your toddler to understand the purpose of a toilet (DH 2009, Rogers 2002). If you have a son, try teaching him to wee sitting down to begin with.

Talk about how you can tell it's time for you to go to the toilet. Then explain what's going on as you go yourself. Show him how you wipe with toilet paper, pull up your underwear, flush the toilet, and then wash your hands.

You'll be helping your toddler with these activities for some time, especially with wiping after a poo. But seeing you do it, and talking him through it step-by-step, will get him used to the whole process.

If your toddler has older siblings, or friends who are potty-trained, your younger child may see them using the toilet. He'll then see the skills he's trying to learn being demonstrated (DH 2009).

The next time he poos in his nappy, take him to his potty, sit him down, and empty the nappy beneath him into the bowl. This will help him make the connection between sitting and pooing. After you've emptied his potty into the big toilet, let him flush it if he wants to, but don't make him do it if he's scared. Then encourage him to dress himself and wash his hands when he's done.

Persevere with the potty, if he's ready

Encourage your child to use his potty whenever he feels the urge to go. Give him plenty to drink and encourage him to sit on the potty every few hours (DH 2009, ERIC 2010a). But make sure he knows that he can also tell you if he needs to go, and that you'll accompany him whenever he wants you to.

He'll need to be told to go to the loo at first, though. Chances are, if you ask if he wants to do a wee, he'll reply with a "no". Try saying : "Go and do a wee, then we can go outside and play," so he has more direction from you.

If you can, let him run around sometimes without a nappy, or without any clothing below the waist, with the potty nearby. Tell him he can use it whenever he wants to and remind him occasionally that it's there if he needs it.

Some toddlers won't sit on the potty long enough to relax and let anything come out. Calmly encourage him to sit there for at least a minute or so. Stay with him and talk calmly, or read him a story (ERIC 2010b).

When your toddler uses the potty successfully, give him lots of praise, though don't go too overboard, as he may find too much fuss overwhelming. Even if he continues to have accidents, he'll then start to grasp that getting something in the potty is an accomplishment.

Cope calmly with potty-training accidents

Your child will have several accidents before being completely trained, in the day and night. It can be frustrating, but don't get angry or punish him (DH 2009). Mastering the process will take time. When he has an accident, calmly clean it up without any fuss and suggest that next time he tries to use his potty instead. Sit him on the potty afterwards, to show him where the wee or poo should have gone.

Accidents are part of the potty training process. But if there are lots of accidents and

very little progress, go back to nappies and shelve potty training for a while. Your toddler may not be ready yet (ERIC 2010b). It doesn't mean that you've failed, and it's the best thing to do if you want potty training to work in the long-run.

Night-time potty training

Even when your child is consistently clean and dry all day, it may take him several more months or years to master being dry at night. So don't throw away his nappies just yet. His body is still too immature to reliably wake him up in the middle of the night just to go to the loo.

Most parents start to night train when their child is between three years and four years, and has woken up with a dry nappy a few mornings in a row (ERIC 2010a, b). You could try before then, but make sure you put an absorbent sheet or pad over the bed sheet.

Help cut down on wet nights by not letting him drink too much before bedtime. Though make sure you give him about six or seven cups of drink during the day, or whenever he asks. Tell him that if he does wake up in the middle of the night he can call to you to help him get to the potty.

You could also try leaving a nightlight on in his room and leaving his potty near the bed in case he wants to use it (ERIC 2010b).

Believe it or not, when your child is ready to learn this new skill, he will. And if you wait until he's really ready to start, the process shouldn't be too painful for either of you.

<http://www.babycentre.co.uk/a4399/abc-of-potty-training#section2#ixzz34Dxqrzyh>