

Toilet Training

What is toilet training?

Toilet or “potty” training is the process of teaching children bladder and bowel control.

While most children reach this milestone between the ages of 2 and 4 years old, every child develops at their own pace. Some children have extra physical, developmental or behavioural challenges. This may mean it takes them longer to learn. Even children who have learned to use the potty have the occasional “accident.”

You as parents, other caregivers, and family members can all help your child become toilet trained. Over several months, you will need to be patient, and give daily attention and encouragement to your child.

The best time to start toilet training

Your child’s age alone does not determine whether he is ready for toilet training. Methods of toilet training vary between different cultures. In general, Canadian-based experts recommend a “child-oriented” approach. This encourages the process to occur naturally, when your child is ready. The best time to start toilet training is when your child is mentally, emotionally, and physically ready.

Toilet training takes time

Children often take a few months to learn to control their bowels and bladders during the day. Exactly how long it takes will depend on the child.

Nighttime control often takes much longer. Sometimes it can take months or even years.

Signs your child is ready to start toilet training

Your child may be ready to start toilet training when he:

- can stay dry for several hours
- follows one- or two-step directions
- knows he needs to go
- uses words or gestures to tell you or show you he needs to use the potty
- walks to the potty chair and sits on it
- can pull his pants up and down
- wants to use the toilet or potty, and wear underwear

Toilet training techniques

Prepare yourself

Make sure you have time to devote to your child’s toilet training. Pick a time free of major changes, for example, moving to a new house or the birth of a new sibling. Warmer months may be easier because your child will be wearing less clothing.

Prepare your child

Encourage your child to let you know if he needs to go. Teach him the right words to use. Dress him in clothes that are easy to remove, for example, elastic and Velcro rather than overalls, buttons and zippers.

Potty setup

Make sure the potty is in a position that makes it easy for your child to mount. Be sure your child has good support for his feet.

Start the new routine step by step

Show your child the potty. Explain the new bathroom routine with simple steps:

- First, let your child sit fully clothed on the potty.
- Next, encourage your child to sit on the potty after removing his wet or soiled diaper. You can even put the dirty diaper in the potty. This may help your child understand what the potty is for.
- A day or so later, take your child to the potty several times a day.
- Finally, start the new routine with your child by setting aside specific times every day when you go to the potty. These times could be after your child wakes up, after meals, and before naps and bedtime.

Praise progress

Encourage your child to tell you when he needs to go to the bathroom. Praise him for telling you, even if there is an accident on the way to the potty. Do not punish or threaten to punish your child. Encouragement and support will motivate your child to keep trying and make the next step. Celebrate your child's progress, for example, a switch from diapers to training pants.

Training pants

When your child has used the potty successfully for 1 or 2 weeks, you can start using cotton underwear or training pants.

Show by example

Let your child watch you use the toilet. Go through the steps yourself. Let him know you have to go. Then have him follow you to the toilet. He will learn by watching you.

Toilet training challenges

If your child resists following your directions or using the potty, he is most likely not ready to toilet train. Do not force your child to use the potty. This can lead to long-term conflicts between you and your child or slow down toilet training. Give up for a time and try again when your child is ready.

If your child is constipated, your child may resist toilet training.

If your child has special needs, you may need more guidance from your doctor to decide if your child is ready to begin toilet training.

When to seek medical assistance

If your child has not learned or refuses to toilet train after several months, or if your child is older than 4 years of age, see your family doctor.

Key points

- Most children learn bladder and bowel control between the ages of 2 and 4 years old, however, every child learns at their own speed.
- Your child must reach a certain level of mental and physical maturity before he is ready to start training.
- Toilet training can take several months.
- Nighttime bladder and bowel control can occur months, or even years, after a child masters daytime control.

- Children need patience and encouragement from parents.

