



Steps Toward Toileting Independence

Children who know how to look after their self-care needs are proud of themselves. This sense of accomplishment is important in building a child's self-esteem. Although toilet training can be challenging at times, remember that learning is part of the struggle in achieving independence. A child may be ready to train between the developmental ages of 18 months to 3 years. This may vary for a child with special needs. When you are ready to try toilet training, focus on the progression of the skills rather than the age at which a child is "supposed" to be able to do something.

Signs of Toileting Readiness

- The child has a dry diaper for at least 2 hrs at a time.
- The child has an interest in the toilet, sitting, and flushing.
- The child indicates that their diaper is soiled -- verbally, using signals, or by bringing you a new diaper.
- The child watches other children with interest and follows them in the toileting routine.
- The child sits on the toilet with their clothes on.

Pre-Toilet Training

- Use a chart to record when a child is soiled versus dry. It will give you an idea of approximately when the child may have to use the toilet (see attached resources).
- About 10-15 minutes prior to the usual wet time, or about 1 hour after the last change, have the child sit on the toilet.
- Use a toileting picture sequence to show the child the process of the routine (see attached resources).
- At changing time, remove the child's diaper in the bathroom while they are standing up, if possible, and sit the child on the toilet briefly before putting on the new diaper. Remember to praise every time.
- If the child has a bowel movement in their diaper, empty the contents in the toilet and allow the child to flush it down the toilet.
- Use social stories with the child to promote understanding of the routine.

- Use pretend play to develop the child’s awareness (e.g. Fisher Price people on a miniature toilet or a doll on the potty).
- Try to avoid negative reactions to bowel movements. For example, instead of saying “Oh, stinky,” you might say, “Oh, I smell poo.”

Toilet Training

- Choose a time when the child is physically well and the daily routine is stable.
- Have the child wear clothes that are easily removed by an adult or by the child. Pants with an elastic waistband or draw-strings work best.
- Pull-ups prevent children from feeling wet. Feeling wet can be a motivator for a child to learn to use the toilet. Have the child wear big kid underwear so they can have the sensation of feeling wet. (If you want to avoid getting the rest of their clothes wet, you could have the child wear a pull-up over their underwear. They will still get the sensation of being wet without their outer clothes getting soiled.)
- You may want to increase fluid intake, to increase the urgency to use the toilet.
- Use the toilet visual sequence and social story every time the child follows the toileting routine (see resources for examples).
- When the child is sitting on the toilet, make sure they are comfortable:
 - The child’s feet should be firmly on ground (or a stepping stool or block). This can also provide leverage to help with the muscle contractions for bowel movements.
 - A toilet insert may help the child to sit more comfortably and may provide back support if needed.
 - A book or a small toy may keep the child busy while sitting.
- Praise the child after every attempt, even if they do not urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Verbal praise, clapping, excited encouragement, songs, rewards (sticker chart, a favorite story or toy) can be used to encourage and reward every effort the child makes.
- Accidents are part of the learning process. You should not make a big deal of accidents (feelings of shame could be a barrier for the child in developing toileting independence).
- If a child gets upset or has a lapse, you may want to consider stopping the training for a week or two and then starting again.
- If your child is having trouble making progress toward independence, you can always consult with their pediatrician.

Resources for Toileting Independence

Children's Books on Toileting

- Once Upon a Potty by Alana Frankel (boys and girls versions)
- I Can't, I Won't, No Way!: A Book For Children Who Refuse to Poop: Tracey J. Vessillo, Mike Motz
- Potty by Leslie Patricelle
- Everyone Poops by Taro Gomi

YouTube videos:

- There are a wide range of characters (such as Elmo and Daniel Tiger) with songs to help teach toileting independence. Find your favorite.
- The Spiderman Poopeth video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uFed9h4UVg>

Website links

- Zero to Three has a whole host of information for toileting independence.
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/266-potty-training-learning-to-the-use-the-toilet>
- NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children
Toilet Learning for Toddlers
<https://oldweb.naeyc.org/ece/1998/17.asp>
- The American Occupational Therapy Association: 6 Tips for Successful Potty Training
<https://www.aota.org/Publications-News/ForTheMedia/PressReleases/2015/021815-ToiletTrainingTips.aspx>
- Kid's Health
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/toilet-teaching.html>
- American Academy of Pediatrics:
Toileting Basics and The Bare-Bottomed Weekend
https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/practicing-safety/Documents/guide_for_parents_the-basics.pdf
- Daytime Wetting and Soiling
https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/practicing-safety/Documents/guide_for_parents_daytime%20wetting.pdf

Sample visuals to support the toileting routine:



Sample Tracking Chart:

Child's name:

Day/date	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
<i>Mon/22</i>	<i>9 a.m.</i> <i>BMB, UB</i>	<i>12 noon</i> <i>PS, UT</i>	<i>2 p.m.</i> <i>BMP, UP</i>						

BMT = bowel movement in toilet UT = urinates in toilet
 BMP = bowel movement in pants UP = urinates in pants
 BMB = bowel movement in bed UB = urinates in bed
 PS = practice sits

Directions: When your child has a bowel movement or urinates:

1. Put day of week and date in the first column.
2. Put time of day in "Time" column.
3. Add the code to the "Time" column.
4. Continue each day.