



## Toilet Training Readiness



**M**any parents get nervous when they think about toilet training their young child. The folklore about toilet training may have a lot to do with their anxiety.

For example, parents hear stories about children being toilet trained at six months of age. Those kinds of stories are ridiculous; a child who can't walk cannot possibly go to the toilet without help, which is what being toilet trained means. Or, a mother hears from relatives that as a child, she was easily trained and then never had an accident – day or night. Such

folklore makes parents think there is some simple way – if only they knew it – to toilet train a child once and for all. No wonder parents question whether they or their child are up to the task of toilet training.

We'd like to help you get past these myths and misconceptions and provide some practical, common sense information that can help prepare you for toilet training and make it a more pleasant and satisfying experience.

### Forget the folklore

You can toilet train your child effectively and efficiently if you keep in mind some basic guidelines. Do these four things before you get started with your training:

#### Relax

Toilet training is often the first child-rearing task parents take a strong stand on. Sure, it is important. But adding tension and pressure to the process will not make it any easier for you or your child. Remember, unlike eating, sleeping and playing, there is no natural, immediate payoff for your child when he or she uses the toilet. Your child may not always cooperate with you during toilet training, but your tension will just make things worse. You know your child eventually will learn to use the toilet, so don't make it a contest of wills. Be calm and patient, and allow your child some time to get used to the idea.

#### Wait

Most children are toilet trained when they are 2, 3 or 4 years old. A few children are ready earlier, but just to be on the safe side, wait until your child is at least 2 years old.

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## Make sure you are ready

Having other parts of your life running smoothly will help ease the chore of toilet training. So ask yourself questions like these to determine if the time is right to take on the task: Do you really want to find out where the bathroom is in every store and restaurant you go to or on every highway and street you drive down? Are you ready for potty interruptions all day long? Have the grandparents let up on their pressure about toilet training? (Remember, toilet training does not need to be a community affair. If you don't want to mention your child's efforts to anyone else, don't.) Has the crisis at work passed? Is the household relatively stable now, and will it continue to be so for a few weeks?

## Make sure your child is ready

Here are a few of the basic signs or skills that can indicate when a child is ready for toilet training. Your child:

- Is at least 2 years old (children under 2 aren't physically able to consistently control their bladder and bowels)
- Can stay dry for several hours at a time
- Has regular, predictable bowel movements
- Is aware of the need to go potty (e.g., squinting face, special squatting stance, wiggling of hips/legs, etc.)
- Understands toileting words such as "wet," "dry," "dirty" and "potty"
- Asks to have his or her diaper changed
- Expresses a desire to wear underwear or "big boy/big girl" underpants
- Is able to pick up objects, lower and raise pants, and walk from room to room easily
- Is able to follow one-step instructions, such as "Sit down" or "Follow me"
- Can sit quietly for 2 to 5 minutes


## 6 Basic Steps to Getting Started

1. **Let your child watch you.** Children are great imitators: if you're comfortable with it, bring your child along when you use the toilet.
2. **Set out a potty chair** so as you begin toilet training, your child can get used to it.
3. **Give your child extra fluids.** This will provide more opportunities for your child to practice newly learned toileting skills.
4. **Practice, practice, practice.** Rather than asking if he or she needs to go, simply take your child to the bathroom and have him or her practice sitting and pulling his or her pants down and up. (With boys, it's best to have them start by sitting down to urinate.)
5. **Provide LOTS OF PRAISE.** Every time your child does any toileting behavior correctly (e.g., pulls down pants, sits on the potty, has a bowel movement in toilet), make a BIG DEAL about it! Occasionally giving small rewards can provide extra incentive.
6. **Don't force the action.** Like adults, children are more likely to quickly pick up a new skill when the process is stress-free.

By forgetting the folklore, following a few guidelines, getting yourself and your child ready, and preparing, toilet training should be easier for everyone involved.

## Additional Resource

→ ***Help! There's a Toddler in the House!*** by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.

 **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.