



The 7 P's of Toilet Training



The first step in toilet training is to make sure both you and your child are ready.

Okay, we realize no one is ever really totally ready for toilet training. But your child should be at least developmentally and behaviorally ready. That means your untrained child should be at least 2 years old and be able to do things like walk from room to room, raise and lower his or her own pants, sit independently and follow a few one-step commands without raising a big fuss.

Also, be aware that long after your child is toilet trained, daytime wetting and soiling accidents will

happen from time to time – and that's the good news. The bad news is that bedwetting accidents are common all the way up to age 7, especially in boys. If accidents do become a frequent problem, you should probably ask your child's doctor about them.

Now let's get down to business. The letter P will figure powerfully in our plan. In fact, let's call it:

➔ The 7 P's Potty Problem Prevention Plan

1. **Parent Modeling.** Frequently allow your child to go with either you or your spouse to the bathroom. It's like anything else; a smart kid can learn a lot by watching an expert. If you have some modesty about this, please park it for a while. After all, it's just you and your child, and both of you have seen all there is to see, so to speak.
2. **Potty Chair.** Give your child a chance to get used to and comfortable with the potty chair. Set it out and let your child sit on it, name it and put stickers on it.
3. **Practice.** Let your child practice using the potty chair. This practice should be "play" practice, with clothes on. The next part may be difficult for some dads, but trust me, it's only temporary. In the beginning, boys should be trained to sit on the potty chair or the toilet, for two reasons. First, sitting encourages bowel movements and so you might get a "twofer," which is a bowel movement and urination during the same sitting. Second, sitting will help avoid what one might call the "garden hose" effect. Untrained boys have not yet had to stand, urinate and aim all at the same time and may (will) accidentally spray the room (missing the potty or the

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toilet). So, if you can stand it, so to speak, boys should sit. Later, when toilet training is well established, they can stand.

4. **Pampers® and Pull-ups®.** Unfortunately, for the program to work, your child must go “cold turkey” on Pampers and Pull-ups, except at bedtime. (Daytime and nighttime training programs should be separate; while you are working on daytime training, it is fine to keep kids in Pampers or Pull-ups at night.) The reason for the cold-turkey approach is simple: Pampers and Pull-ups are actually wearable toilets, and your child is unlikely to see much need for using the one in your home when he or she can much more easily use the one he or she is wearing.
5. **Prompting (Tell, Don’t Ask).** As discussed in P #3, practice is important. Unfortunately, its importance will be much more apparent to you than to your child. In fact, let’s tell it like it is – he or she could probably care less. So you will need to prompt your child to go to the bathroom and sit for a few minutes multiple times a day. Tell, don’t ask. When we ask, what children actually hear is something like, “Would you like to go and sit on a large, cold porcelain receptacle that is full of potty water?” You can see how the logical answer to this question is “No.” So instead of asking, just tell them it is time to go, take them to the bathroom and have them sit. Then refer to P #6.
6. **Praise.** In the early stages of a training program, toileting behaviors are like little sprouts in a spring garden – both need something to help them grow. For little sprouts, its water and fertilizer (so to speak). For toileting behaviors, praise and approval are the water and fertilizer that help them grow and blossom. So every time your child does any toileting behavior correctly – pulls down his or her pants, sits on the potty, whatever – be sure to praise him or her. Do this even when your child is having more accidents than successes.

Remember, as children enter into the training phase, the training is likely to be way more important to you than it is to them. But if they get the idea that using the potty is a way for them to

get their names in lights, the importance of training will quickly increase for them, along with their cooperation. You can take this a step further and use rewards. One method is to wrap little items – stickers, tiny toys, beads, gum, etc. – in tin foil and put them in jar near the bathroom. When your child achieves a success at any level, he or she gets to grab one prize (not one handful) from the jar. Praise and rewards make the training experience fulfilling, and make it more likely that children will repeat their positive toilet behaviors.

7. **Postpone.** Here in P #7 we have some really good news. You can always postpone. You can always put kids back in Pampers or Pull-ups, declare a moratorium on any discussion about toileting for a few weeks (or even months) and then start again. Your child will ultimately be motivated to be trained, possibly by something other than your prompting. So the point of P #7 is that if training is going badly, for whatever reason, you can use the time-honored method for winning a war that is being lost – declare victory and retreat.

In potty training, as in life, there are no guarantees. Helping your child learn to use the toilet can often be a “hit-and-miss” endeavor (both literally and figuratively). In general, try and remember that a child who is learning to use the toilet has to master many different skills, and success does not come all at once. So give your child time and expect some accidents. After all, wouldn’t you rather be surprised than disappointed? Finally, throughout the process, try to remain calm and patient.

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**.