



# TOILET TRAINING

For a child, learning to use the toilet is just one more developmental step, like learning to walk. Why do adults make such a fuss about it? Let's think about the process . . .

## WHEN DO I START TOILET TRAINING?

It will be important to wait to let your child get the idea.

She will need to make the decision to accomplish this achievement.

As your child struggles with independence, she seeks to be in control of herself and much of her life. She will also want to be in control of her own toilet habits.

At around two years of age, your child may begin to show several developmental steps to let you know she is ready.

## HOW DO I KNOW MY CHILD IS READY?

Your child will be over the excitement of walking and will be ready to sit down.

He will be ready to understand such words and concepts as "This is your potty chair. Mine is the big one. Someday you'll go on yours like I do on mine."

At around two, children want to imitate their parents or older siblings. This imitation can be used to develop toilet behaviors. Is he interested in your going to the bathroom?

Your child shows some decrease in negativism. He should be ready to show some cooperation.

Your child is aware of his body functions.

**Has wet:** pulls at his pants  
when he has wet or had a b.m.

**Is wetting:** knows and lets you  
know he is in the middle of wetting  
or having a b.m.

**Will wet:** knows he will SOON wet  
or have a b.m.

Up to this point you have probably talked with your child about bathroom behaviors. He will have observed you and others using the toilet. He has probably asked many questions about going to the potty.

**FIRST** Get him a potty chair on the floor, so he can take it wherever he wants. Call it his and let him get used to it as his. The big one is for you, his parents. The little one is for him to learn with.

**SECOND** After a week or so, take him to sit on his toilet, in the bathroom, in his clothes, while you sit on yours.

Read to him or give him a cookie to keep him there momentarily. This is just to establish the daily routine of sitting on a potty chair. If you take his clothes off at this point, it may frighten him.

**THIRD** The next week, ask him if it's all right to take his diaper off so he can sit on it, once a day. You sit on your potty, he sits on his.

**FOURTH** The third week, take him to his potty with his dirty diaper to undo it, then drop the b.m. in the toilet.

Say something like: *"This is where you can go someday to do your b.m. This is what Mommy and Daddy do everyday. This is your potty. This is mine."*

If it upsets your child, don't flush his b.m. away in your toilet while he watches. Many children feel it's part of themselves. Don't get rid of it until your child loses interest and walks away.

**FIFTH** At this time, if he's been interested in the previous steps, you can offer to take his clothes off and let him run and let him run around with a bare bottom if you are comfortable with this.

If he's ready to try it by himself, offer to put the potty in his room or any convenient place. He can go to it himself when he wants to.

Remind him every hour to try to go. If he's ready, he will be able to cooperate on the potty.

**IF AT ANY TIME DURING THESE STEPS YOUR CHILD RESISTS, FORGET THE TRAINING FOR A WHILE. YOU ARE SIMPLY SHOWING HIM EACH STEP SO HE CAN TAKE IT FOR HIMSELF.**

**SIXTH** If he's really ready, you can leave his pants off for longer and longer periods.

If he wets or has a b.m. on the floor frequently, go back to diapers. Don't make a fuss of it. Simply say, *"We'll try again. There's no hurry. Someday you'll do it like Mommy and Daddy."*

You are depending on his desire to imitate and identify with important people—YOU!

## TIPS TO REMEMBER

### PARENTS SHOULD BE RELAXED AND POSITIVE

Toilet training is not a contest or race. Don't worry about how fast or how slow somebody's child is toilet trained.

Pressuring your child will not make him be successful. If you get angry, he may be afraid to try for fear of making a mistake.

Don't set deadlines. Each step must be at your child's timing.

Never shame your child or punish him for not using the toilet.

Don't expect overnight results. Toilet training takes patience.

### POTTY CHAIRS

Potty chairs are good because your child can use one all by himself. Be sure that you choose one that won't tip over if your child leans to the side.

Don't strap children in. This will scare them and threaten their independence that they have worked so hard to gain. They don't like to be strapped in and it will make training harder.

### REGRESSION

Each child has different strengths, interests and temperamental styles. When a child is concentrating on one skill, he will focus his energy on that skill and often regress in another area.

When a child is focusing on his language skills, for example, and you rush him to focus on toilet learning, he can either follow or resist. Control is very important particularly to 2 and 3-year-olds who will potty when they choose.

When we push too hard, a child will tell us to slow down by regressing or pulling back to a more comfortable point. Regression is a normal part of development. A child also regresses if he pushes himself too fast. A child drives himself to succeed. Sometimes he pushes himself a little further

than he is comfortable and needs to regress to an easier place.

When a child is learning to potty, his behavior can also regress. He may start fussing about things that ordinarily don't bother him. He may test the bedtime limits with his newfound excuse that he has to try to potty.

Consistent, positive structure is important during the training process. A routine that is not too busy is helpful. Taking one step at a time and keeping the goals incremental helps keep the pressure down. Parents as well as children have the option of pulling back to a more comfortable point.

### SICK CHILDREN

Never try to toilet train a sick child. If your child is ill, she may have accidents and not want to sit on the potty chair. Just wait until your child feels better again.

### WIPING

Small children need help wiping because their arms are not long enough to reach behind themselves. Let him try to help you so he will learn how. Always wipe front to back to decrease the chance of infection. Tell him that everybody does this.

### POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement encourages the target behavior, bribes don't. A positive reinforcement rewards appropriate behavior. A bribe is offered to stop inappropriate behavior.

Make the initial payoff certain.  
Start with something he is already doing.  
(Ex. Sitting on the potty).

Make the goals achievable.  
Start at a place where you know your child can succeed so you will be able to reinforce the behavior and introduce your child to the program. Explain the program a few times until he understands.

Choose a reinforcer that children are willing to work for. Time with a parent is very reinforcing.

Make the payoff fit the achievement.