

## Toileting Tips

Children gain bladder and bowel control at varying ages and stages of development, and, as in all developmental milestones, to be successful there must be a convergence of physical, intellectual, psychological, verbal, social/emotional and motor readiness. Appropriate support and encouragement from adults is crucial.

### **Typical Timetable of Development that Supports Toilet Training**

**18 – 24 months** increasing control over their bowel and bladder; able to recognize they are urinating or having a bowel movement (they might go into another room, hide under a table, stop whatever they're doing)

**24 – 36 months** increased urge toward self-mastery; able to manage simple clothing; increased ability to understand verbal explanations; takes great pleasure in increasing competence ("I do it!"); awareness and imitation of adult behavior; increased desire to please and to win praise

**36+ months** gradual maturation of digestive system leads to more predictable toileting habits and a decrease in accidents; improved ability to break focus and go to the toilet and to resist distraction while getting there; peer pressure encourages compliance; enjoys feeling successful and "grown up"

Toilet training is a big step for kids and parents. Being at School is exciting and distracting, so we suggest that families start toilet training before School begins. Summertime, with easy up and down clothes, is the perfect opportunity! Learning to separate at School can be a big adjustment and trying to introduce a new skill at the same time can be stressful for children and adults. The secret to success? Timing, patience, and consistency.

It can be helpful to think of toilet training as a process in which you and your child have your own "jobs" to do.

In order to be successful in toilet training a child must have achieved these developmental milestones:

- Awareness of the need to go and the basic understanding of cause and effect
- A desire for self-mastery, to "be big"
- Able to stay dry for up to two hours
- Ability to communicate their need to go
- Fine motor skills to pull clothing up and down/ on and off
- Attention span to remain seated on the toilet long enough to eliminate successfully (3 to 5 minutes)
- Social awareness – the observation of, and desire to be like others; social identity with peers or same-sex adult

In order to nurture a positive toilet training experience, Parents should:

- Commit to devoting the time and energy to be consistent on a daily basis
- Be consistent – keep their bathroom routine as consistent as possible with the same sequence of actions – remove clothes; sit on potty; wipe; pull up clothes; flush; wash hands.

- Be positive – praise small successes; some children respond well to small rewards (a treat, sticker, checkmark on the calendar, calling a loved one to share the news, a big high-five). For some, getting to flush the toilet is a big reward. Try using specific words of praise and encouragement (“You listened to your body and knew you needed to go.” “You went in the potty like big kids do!” “You’re getting big!”).
- Children are most successful in toilet training when the focus is on them being grown up and able to do it for themselves, not on what an adult wants.
- Provide what they need to be successful like a portable seat, potty chair, or a stool at the toilet. They feel more stable and will have better success (i.e. leverage) when their legs aren’t dangling. Reading books, playing music, or limited time with a device can help them stay seated.
- An accident is an opportunity to do better next time. If they have an accident, provide predictable, non-punitive consequences (help clean up, re-dress themselves) and encouragement such as “It’s ok. Accidents can happen.” “Don’t worry, you’ll keep working on it.”
- Stay involved and observe – monitor their bathroom behavior so that you can quickly identify and resolve any new problem that may arise
- Pull ups don’t give children the sensory feedback of being wet or soiled. Try transitioning to thicker, “real” underwear so the child is aware when they’re wet or soiled. Most children dislike the feeling, which is a motivation to go on the potty.
- Celebrate that they’re a BIG KID now by shopping for “real” underwear. They love choosing their own Paw Patrol or Princess underwear, and most of them can’t wait to show them off to their teachers and friends, too!
- Try to ENJOY this big step – toilet training is a necessary chore, but it can also be fun at times. Don’t take your child’s hesitations, passing fears, or resistance too seriously. Try to find joy and humor in the charming memorable moments along the way! You may find yourself getting to know your child in a new way – appreciating their special qualities, gaining a better understanding of how they adapt to change, incorporating their interests, and respecting your child as a unique, interesting, and growing up little person.

### The What If’s

- If you start seeing power struggles developing over potty training, significant regression in skills they had previously mastered, or serious physical issues like withholding urine or constipation, it might be time to take a step back, stop talking about potty training, and try again in a week or two.
- if your preschooler is not interested in, or having great difficulty being potty trained, reach out to your health care provider. Occasionally children have physical issues that make potty training more difficult, so a checkup is a good idea. Children with special needs may take longer to learn to use the toilet, so you may also want to consult with a child development specialist. They can help you figure out what the challenges might be and identify strategies and supports that might be more successful.

Mastering this life-long skill will increase your child’s self-confidence, independence, and self-esteem. Leaving the days of diapers and pullups behind can be freeing (and cheaper) for you, too! What a wonderful process to be a part of! Start being a big kid now!!