

TIP SHEET: Toilet Training

Ages Affected: 2 ½–4 years old

Potty training is a big step for parents and kids alike and knowing when your child is ready to transition from diapers is important. The secret to success? Patience. Most children usually learn to use the potty somewhere between the ages of 2 ½ and 4 years, and are night trained by 8 years. Toilet training can become a long and frustrating process if you try to start it before your child is ready—you can't force your child to learn.

Signs that your child is ready to be potty trained:

This could include: asking to go to the bathroom, ability to control the urge to wet/soil, an interest in the toilet or to not wet themselves.

Once your child is ready to learn, toilet training can take around 3 to 4 weeks. Most children still accidentally wet or soil their pants a year or more after learning, so be patient. Don't worry if your child is faster or slower than others.

Here are some tips to help teach your child:

- Place a potty chair in the bathroom. Encourage your child to sit on the potty chair with or without a diaper. Make sure your child's feet rest firmly on the floor or a stool.
- Help your child understand how to talk about the bathroom using simple, correct terms. You might dump the contents of a dirty diaper into the potty chair to show its purpose or let your child see family members of his or her sex using the toilet.
- Schedule potty breaks. Have him sit on the potty chair or toilet without a diaper for a few minutes, several times a day. Stay with him and read potty training books or give him a special toy to use while sitting on the potty chair or toilet. Even if he just sits there, praise him for trying and remind him that he can try again later.
- When you notice signs that your child may need to use the toilet such as squirming, squatting or holding the genital area, respond quickly. Help your child become familiar with these signals, stop what she is doing and head to the toilet. Praise your child for telling you when she has to go.
- For boys, it's often best to master urination sitting down, and then move to standing up after bowel training is complete.
- Teach girls to wipe carefully from front to back.
- Dress your child in loose clothing, without fasteners or buttons, so your child can remove items more easily.
- When it's time to flush, let her do the honors. Make sure your child washes her hands after using the toilet.
- Treat mistakes lightly. Accidents happen, especially when your child is tired or upset. When it happens, stay calm. Simply say, "Uh-oh. There was an accident. Let's change you. Pretty soon you'll remember to use the potty chair every time you have to go."
- Consider prizes. Maybe stickers or stars on a chart or an extra trip to the park. Experiment to find what works best for your child. Make sure you are still verbally praising her such as, "How exciting! You're learning to use the toilet just like big kids do!" Be positive even if a trip to the toilet isn't successful.
- After several weeks of successful potty breaks, your child may be ready to trade diapers for training pants or regular underwear. Celebrate this transition.
- Most children master daytime bladder control by age six. Nighttime control may take months or even years. In the meantime, use disposable training pants or plastic mattress covers when your child sleeps.