



Toilet Learning

There is no set age for learning to use the toilet. Start when your child shows you they are ready. Make toilet learning a positive experience. Your child will learn a new skill and feel a sense of accomplishment.

Why is it now called “toilet learning” instead of “toilet training”?

The term “toilet learning” is used because it is important to follow your child’s cues. It is also important to accept that every child is different and will use the toilet when they are ready.

Some forms of toilet training are directed by an adult, have a set timeline, and don’t always ensure the child is ready for training before beginning.

How do I know my child is ready for toilet learning?

Most children learn to use the toilet between the ages of 24 and 48 months. Staying dry all night often takes longer, sometimes up to 6 years of age or older.

Your child may be ready for toilet learning if you answer ‘yes’ to most of the questions below:

- Does your child stay dry for a few hours at a time or occasionally wake up dry after a nap?
- Does your child know when they are about to urinate or have a bowel movement? Some children will squat in a corner when they are having a bowel movement.
- Can your child follow simple directions such as “Let’s go to the toilet?”
- Can your child let you know when they need to use the toilet?
- Is your child able to pull down their pants without help?

The final step is an ability to communicate. Your child should be able to communicate basic needs, such as hunger or thirst.

Toilet learning is not about the parent being sensitive to their child’s body and then placing them on the potty in time. Toilet learning is the child learning to:

- recognize when they are about to urinate or have a bowel movement;
- communicate what is about to happen and ask you for help if necessary; and
- control the urge until they get seated on the potty.

Do not pressure your child to use the toilet. Rushing the process may make it more difficult and frustrating for both of you. Be patient – your child is learning a new skill.

How can I introduce the idea of toilet learning?

To get started, buy a potty chair and put it in the bathroom next to the toilet, or get a toilet seat that fits on top of the regular seat. Make sure the seat is stable and provide a solid step stool for your child to use to get up onto the toilet. You can explain – “When you are ready, you can use the potty just like Mom or Dad uses the toilet.”

When your child shows some interest in toilet learning, you can invite them to join you in the bathroom. Sit reading a magazine – offer them a favourite book to read. You are teaching them to relax and let nature take its course. Do not rush your child.

At some point, your child will want to sit on the potty or use the toilet just like you. This idea of wanting to be like an adult can be a great motivator for toddlers. Children with older

siblings or those in daycare often learn from watching.

Should I keep my child in diapers while they are toilet learning?

Although some children learn to control both bowel movements and urination at the same time, controlling urination is harder. You may choose to let your toddler go without pants around the easily cleaned parts of the house or yard. This allows your toddler to sit on the potty quickly when they feel the urge to go.

Children differ in their willingness to give up diapers. Some children will feel more secure wearing them at night for a long time after they routinely stay dry. Others are so sure of themselves that they refuse to wear them after a week of success.

How can I start toilet learning with my child?

Talk about going on the potty and keep the potty handy. When your child feels the urge to urinate, it will be a very short time before they must go to the bathroom. Over time, your child will be able to control the urge to urinate for a longer period of time.

Encourage and praise your child's actions and successes. Focus your praise on the action rather than 'being good'. Use comments such as "Wow - you had a pee on the potty!" rather than "Good boy." Always use gentle hands and a kind voice.

Here are some suggestions to help your child start using the toilet:

- Wait for a time when there aren't other big changes in your child's life to get started.
- Use reminders such as "It is potty time."
- Encourage your child to sit on the potty. Keep the potty chair next to the toilet.

- Give praise for action, such as "It is great you went pee in the potty" rather than "good girl."
- Children may be frightened by a flushing toilet so be sensitive to this when you empty the potty. Strange toilets often frighten young children. Pack the potty along until they are comfortable using the bathroom away from home.

How can I help my child succeed?

During the first year, toilet learning can be disrupted. Changes, such as moving to a new house, starting playschool, or experiencing the arrival of a new baby, can result in your toddler wanting to wear diapers again or having accidents. Praise your child's efforts and try not to be upset over accidents. With this kind of acceptance, your child will try to use the toilet again after they adjust to any changes in their life. Accidents will happen. Even older children forget to use the toilet, especially if they are sick or very involved in play. Carry a spare set of clothes in case your child has an accident.

Talk to your health care provider if your child does not use the toilet during the day by 4 years of age or continues to wet their pants at night after 5 years of age.

For More Information

To learn more about child development, see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #92a Your Child and Play From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92b Your Child's Development From Birth to 3 Years](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92c Your Child's Feelings](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #92e Time for Bed](#)