

Tip Sheets

Potty Training: Learning to Use the Toilet



Supporting a child who is learning to use the toilet can be an exciting and challenging time for both the caregiver

and the child. It is important to stay positive while learning this new skill for the best results.

Know When to Go

Most children are ready to learn between 24–36 months of age. Look for the child’s readiness cues:

- The child can follow simple instructions.
- The child can help to undress themselves.
- The child can give verbal or facial cues of needing to use the toilet.
- The child seems interested in learning.

The American of Academy of Pediatrics states that in order for a toddler to be successfully toilet trained, they need to be able to:

- Sense the urge to go, and understand what the feeling means.
- Verbalize that they need your help to make it to the toilet and actually go.

Waiting until a child is truly ready will make the experience much faster and more pleasant for everyone involved!

Additional Skills for Success

Verbal Skills

Signs of verbal skill development will be reflected through the use of simple words and the

development of descriptive words for the body parts and their workings.

Throughout this learning process, a child must not only be able to understand your explanations, commands, and responses, but be able to express their own feelings about toilet use. Verbal skills also help the child think more fully about the process of toileting/elimination.

Body Awareness Skills

Before toilet training, a child must be able to associate physical sensations with proper responses or body awareness. A child’s signs of body awareness readiness may include:

- Showing discomfort over a dirty diaper.
- Trying to remove their diaper.
- Resisting being diapered.
- The physical ability to remain dry for up to two hours.

Complex Thinking Skills

By age three, a child’s interest in problem solving will be evolving. Solving problems requires picturing a solution and planning a way to achieve it. This is another sign a child is approaching toilet training readiness.

Developing a Plan

Once a child begins to demonstrate the above skills, a caregiver will need to have a conversation with the child’s parents to determine if the family is ready to develop a toileting plan. There is a much greater chance of success when the plan is consistent in and out of the child’s home.

This plan also needs to take into consideration family preference and customs. Additionally, special support measures may need to be identified and be included in the plan in order to accommodate a child with special needs.

Preparation

It is important to be ready when the child is ready to learn. This might involve having on hand:

- A stepstool so the child can get on the potty; they will need help at first.
- Several pairs of underwear; you will go through many at first. (You will likely still want a pull-on disposable for rest periods).

Plan to have some books available to help pass the time as you wait for success to happen. Offer lots of water to keep the bladder full so that the feeling is understood sooner. With your support, the child will be potty trained soon.

Routines

As in other times throughout the day, using the potty has a routine. Bring the child to the toilet at least every other hour to help them learn the process. Stick to a schedule. Instead of asking the child if they need to go, tell them "it's time to try."

Accidents Happen

All children have accidents. Your patience is key to encouraging them that they'll will remember to use- or make it in time to the potty next time.

Help the child to listen to their body's signals for needing to use the toilet. Stay near the restroom as warnings are often delayed. When a child says that they need to go, be ready to run them to the toilet.

Celebrate the Successes

- Praise the child for trying!
- Allow the child to add a sticker to their own success chart!
- Share the child's success with others!

Avoid Using Shaming Language

Toilet training can be stressful for children, parents, and caregivers. Avoid language and behavioral responses which may reflect shaming.

- Maintain a positive tone when reacting to toileting accidents.
- Avoid telling children diapers are for babies and using phrases such as "big kids don't..."
- Avoid pushing a child to toilet train before they are ready.

Additional Resources

CFOC Standards Database | Toilet Learning/Training
<http://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/2.1.2.5>

CFOC Standards Database | Toilet Learning/Training Equipment
<http://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/5.4.1.7>

HealthyChildren.org | Toilet Training
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/toilet-training>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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