



# First Steps

# #44

## Toilet Training Toddlers

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

One of the biggest events in a young child's life—and a step toward growing up—is learning to use the toilet and not having to wear diapers anymore. Toilet training is a process of helping children learn to use the toilet instead of wetting or passing bowel movements in diapers. While parents may want to pick the age that their child will be when he or she is toilet trained, they might as well accept the fact that children will be trained when they are ready, not when it is convenient for their parents.

Toilet training is easiest when children are physically and emotionally ready, which usually happens between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Typically, girls gain bladder and bowel muscle control before boys do, but each child is an individual and will be toilet trained according to his or her own time clock.

### How Will You Know If Your Child Is Ready to Begin Toilet Training?

- Can she follow simple directions?
- Does he remain dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day?
- Can she walk to and from the bathroom, pull down pants, pull up pants?
- Does he remain dry during nap time?
- Can she tell you when she needs to go?
- Does he understand words about the toileting process?
- Does she seem uncomfortable with wet or soiled diapers?
- Does he show interest in the toilet or the potty chair?
- Are her bowel movements regular and predictable?
- Has he asked to wear grown-up underwear?

Source: "Understanding Children: Toilet Training", Iowa State University

Most experts agree that it makes sense to begin toilet training during summer months when it is warm and children wear less clothing. Dress your child in clothing that is easy for him/her to get off without help. Avoid shirts that snap in the crotch or shorts with zippers, snaps, or buttons.



Children who are learning to use the toilet need to be able to pull their pants down and up quickly and easily. It might even be good to let your child have some time during the day when he or she goes without a diaper. If she has an accident without a diaper, she will feel what is happening and will likely express discomfort. This is an excellent "teachable moment" when you can gently explain that sitting on the potty keeps her clothing dry and clean.

# What Can Parents Do to Help Children Learn to Use the Toilet?

**Be patient.** Toilet training may take all the patience and energy you have! Learning to use the toilet takes time, and each child learns when he/she is ready.



**Relax.** As much as you can, set your own anxiety and eagerness aside and avoid pushing your child to use the toilet. Let him or her set the pace.

**Set up the environment for success.** Put a potty chair near the toilet or have a toilet attachment with a footrest available a few weeks before you think your child will be ready to use it. Explain that when he or she is old enough, it will be there to use.

**Help your child recognize when he/she is urinating or messing.** Most children will squat, grunt, turn red in the face, or stop what they are doing for a moment. Before they can have control, they need to be aware of what they are doing.

**Read potty books to your child.** Reading about using the potty helps children understand the general process and to know that other children learn to use the potty, too. Bookstores and libraries have these books.

**Purchase training pants and easy-to-remove clothing.** Make your child's job easier by letting him/her wear pants/shorts that are easy to pull down and up.

**Wipe carefully.** Wipe girls from front to back to prevent infection. Teach your child always to wash hands with soap and water after using the potty. At first, help with clothing and sit with

your child. Allow your child 4 or 5 minutes to use the toilet. During that time, read a book together or talk about what he/she will play after using the toilet.

**Show your child what to do on the toilet.** Let your child learn by watching you use the toilet. Talk about what you do. If possible, mothers should set an example for girls; fathers should set an example for boys about how to use the toilet. Children can also learn from responsible older brothers and sisters.

**Reward the effort.** Praise your child's attempts to use the toilet, even if nothing comes out. Accidents will happen, so your child may go right after being taken off the toilet. This is not unusual, and it is important that you do not punish your child or show disappointment. It takes time to learn this grown-up skill. If accidents seem to be too frequent, it may be a good idea to hold off training and try again in a few weeks.

**Be prepared away from home.** Take a potty seat in the car with you so you can help your child immediately when he/she has to go. Little bladders can't hold too long!

**Understand the difference between daytime and nighttime training.** Your child may be able to manage his/her toileting during the day with few or no accidents, but that does not mean he/she will be dry all night. Provide diapers or waterproof bedding until your child sleeps through the night dry. (Please read our First Steps #32 on Bedwetting.)

Sources: Lansky, Vicki. Practical Parenting Tips and Davis, Laura and Keyser, Janis. Becoming the Parent You Want to Be.

*For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.*

