

## Parents Ask Us About...

# TOILET TRAINING

Toilet training usually occurs around the second year, during a time when a child is seeking control and testing limits. During the process, children must learn to trust themselves and their parents. Adults cannot control when or how much a child will use the toilet, but they can create a relaxed environment in which the child will learn to trust body signals and relieve them in an appropriate way.

## READINESS

To be successful, the child must be physically and psychologically ready to begin the process. **It is important to know that until the child has reached this readiness level, toilet training may result in frustration and low self esteem.** Adults can watch for the signs of physical and psychological readiness.

**Physical Readiness** for toileting involves fine motor development control of the sphincter muscles around the urethra. In addition, the cognitive ability to process signals from the body, plan and take action must be in place. According to the Gesell Institute of Human Development, this occurs in most children around two and half years. Other experts mention 20 months and up. Following are the physical stages readiness for toilet training. In some children they seem to happen all at once. In other children, stages are stretched out over several weeks, even months. The order *usually* follows this sequence:

- **Recognizes bodily function as it occurs**
- **Stays dry for long periods during awake daytime hours**
- **Recognizes the urge to eliminate before it occurs.**
- **Comprehends and follows simple directions**
- **Effectively communicates need to “go”**
- **Able to stop the flow of urine.**

**Psychological Readiness** - The other sign of readiness is psychological readiness or desire. Adults can play an important role in this area. They can support or adversely affect training once readiness has occurred and the process has begun. It is important to demonstrate trust by letting the child take the lead. Support efforts with consistency, a matter of fact tone of voice, and an opportunity to “play” at going potty.

## THE TOILETING PROCESS

**The most common reason a child refuses to potty train is too much pressure from adults. Therefore, it is important that parents create a relaxed and stress-free atmosphere.**

During the toilet training process the following tips may be helpful.

- **Children learn through play** - Decide together if your child will use the toilet or a potty chair. If a potty chair is chosen, place it in the bathroom long before its use is anticipated use. Let the child explore the operation of the chair or toilet. Place a step stool near the

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toilet and allow the child to practice sitting on it with and without clothing. Turn on the water if the child is unclothed. There is a good chance of accidental success! Read books while seated on the potty. Remember to insist that all potty activity be followed with hand washing. **\*Important: Potty play must be supervised. Every year drowning deaths are reported when toddlers who fall head first into toilets and cannot right themselves.**

- **Point out body language signals**— “I hear your tummy growling. I think your body is telling you it is hungry.” “You are pushing and having a BM (bowel movement). Soon you will be able to sit on the potty to do that.” Be careful not to editorialize and or criticize. Keep your comments light and your voice matter of fact. To assist the child in discovering how his body feels when it needs to “go”, find a day when the child can be allowed to run around outside with a naked bottom. When a bodily function is occurring, ask the child how it feels when he needs to go potty. Then tell the child, “Listen to your body. The next time you feel that way, run to the potty!”
- **Wear cloth training pants** after readiness is demonstrated. Diapers and disposable pants absorb quickly and thoroughly. It is sometimes difficult for a child to tell when he is wet. This slows down the process. It is best to let the child wear cloth underpants and experience accidents. If the adult attaches no shame to the mishaps, the child will quickly learn to read his body’s signals.
- **Use a model.** Dr. Berry Brazelton says the best training for children is to be able to see others of the same sex toileting. If the child is in a school program, he will probably get the experience from classmates. If not, then a home demonstration will help the child understand much quicker than explanations. Observing others using the toilet and pretending to teaching a doll which drinks and wets how to use the potty will increase the excitement, reinforce the learning and give the child control.
- **Expect accidents.** People learn through their mistakes. The early childhood educator, Jean Piaget, maintained that the only knowledge which is truly possessed by a child is the knowledge acquired through trial and error. When an accident occurs, be matter of fact and allow the child to assist in the clean up. Do not to shame the child. This process will aid the child in future situations.
- **Share information so that school and home can be consistent.** At first, bring three plastic bags with complete changes of clothing including socks and shoes in each bag. After an accident, clean clothes are put on the child. Soiled clothes are put in the plastic bag and placed inside the back pack so the child is not shamed by wet clothes. Tennis shoes should not be worn after a potty accident, so extra shoes will be needed. Water shoes may be helpful and can be easily disinfected after a potty accident. However, most water shoes are not very safe for toddlers as they climb and run outside, so pack tennis shoes for outside play.

You will notice several stages in the toileting process. At first you should invite the child to go to the potty every thirty minutes to an hour. Most of these trips will not produce any urine. In the next stage, the child will tell you about the need to urinate while it is occurring. Soon after, the child will begin to inform you *before* urinating. Next, fidgeting movements, or the “bathroom dance” will signal you to remind your child to use the toilet. Eventually, the child will achieve autonomy and go independently. All potty procedures should be supervised discreetly so the child experiences independence at each stage. Children should pull up their own pants, flush and wash their hands. The potty and surrounding area should be disinfected after each use.

The most important aspect of toilet training to remember is that the child is in charge. Relax and encourage the child to learn to trust his body, his parents, his teachers and his classmates as he passes this developmental milestone.

