



PARENT *handout*

Learning to Use the Toilet

Most toddlers learn to use the toilet between 2 ½ and 3 years old. This is a big step in your child's development. It takes practice and time – and there will be mistakes! You can help your toddler prepare, but remember that she will develop this skill at her own rate.

Learning to use the toilet is a three-step process. First, you recognize your child's signs of readiness. Second, you prepare your child for the transition to the toilet. Third, your child makes the change from diapers to underwear.

Recognizing the signs of readiness

Your toddler may show some of the following cues:

- > Staying dry for two hours at a time.
- > Waking up dry from a nap.
- > Having regular bowel movements.
- > Making sounds and grimaces when having a bowel movement.
- > Telling you when she is wet or dirty.
- > Caring about having a clean diaper.
- > Showing an interest in wanting to imitate adults and “be like a grownup.”

Preparing your toddler for using the toilet

- > Teach your child the words you want her to use for the toilet and bathroom functions.
- > Let her see you and other family members use the toilet. Explain what you are doing, using the words you want her to learn.
- > Read books about toilet learning.
- > Get a potty chair so that she has her own place to sit while she is learning the routine.
- > Have her just sit on the chair or the toilet seat with her clothes on. Then have her try them without wearing a diaper. (If your toddler is a boy, it may be less confusing, at this stage, to have him sit for both urinating and bowel movements.)
- > Talk with your child about how she

will soon use the toilet all the time. For now, she can wear diapers until she feels ready for underwear.

- > Help her learn how to undress for using the toilet and put her clothes back on afterward.
- > Teach her how to wash her hands after using the toilet.

Making a successful change

Wait until your toddler tells you that she is ready to make the change over from diapers to underpants. Be patient and prepare to invest extra time in this new skill.

Plan for this change when your family life is calm – no out-of-town visitors, no new baby in the house, no vacations.

Never shame or punish your child for having accidents. It is normal for children to revert to wetting their pants even after they have stayed dry for many days.

Young children's understanding and feelings toward their bodies are central to how they see themselves. Your interactions during toilet learning help your child form a positive attitude about her body and how she cares for herself.



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These tips may help toilet learning go more smoothly.

- > Set up routine times for your toddler to visit the potty chair or toilet – for example, following each meal, once in between meals, and at bedtime.
- > Check in with your child once every two hours to ask if she is dry. If she says yes, suggest she sit on toilet. If not, wait another two hours before asking again. If you pressure her, toilet learning could become a power struggle.
- > If your toddler asks to sit on the toilet without needing to go, let her. She will enjoy trying it out!
- > When she has accidents, calmly help her clean up and change clothes. Let her know that you understand that mistakes can happen.
- > Expect her to want to go to the bathroom if you are at a store, a restaurant or a friend's home. She is curious about toilets everywhere.
- > Make sure she has easy-to-remove clothing while she is learning the process.
- > Know that daytime control happens much faster than night time control. Be prepared for diapers at night, at least for a while.
- > Listen for your toddler to tell you when she is ready to wear underpants to bed at night.
- > Let your toddler know that you are proud of how she is learning this new skill!



REFLECTION

Take time to think about this process.

What are your expectations about your child learning to use the toilet?

What beliefs do your family members have about toilet learning, and how do they match with your expectations?

What external factors seem to be pressuring you to get your child out of diapers?