

TIPS FOR POTTY TRAINING BOYS

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Updated October 2018

The best time to start potty training your son

Teaching your son how to use the potty requires a reasonable degree of cooperation and motivation from him, plus time and patience from you.

The key to potty training success is starting when your son is interested, willing, and physically able. Although some kids are ready as young as 18 months, others may not be prepared to learn until well past their third birthday. Some experts believe that boys stay in diapers a bit longer than girls because they're generally more active and may be less likely to stop and take the time to use the potty.

There's no point in trying to get a head start. When parents begin potty training too soon, the process is likely to take longer. In other words, you'll arrive at your destination at the same time, no matter when you start.

Once you've determined that your son is ready to start potty training, focus on timing. Stress or big life changes, like a new sibling or a move, may make toilet training difficult.

Be sure your child's routine is well established. Wait until he seems open to new ideas, so you can potty train successfully.

Let him watch and learn

Toddlers learn by imitation, and watching you use the bathroom is a natural first step. He may notice that daddy uses the potty differently than mommy does, which creates a great opportunity for you to explain the basic mechanics of how boys use the bathroom.

Be anatomically precise when talking about body parts. Teaching him to call his penis a "pee-pee" when you don't use a silly name for any other body part may imply that his genitals are embarrassing.

Buy the right equipment

When your child is sitting on the potty, it's important that he's able to lean slightly forward with his feet on the ground, especially when he's having a bowel movement. Most experts advise buying [a child-size potty](#), which your toddler can claim for his own and which will also feel more secure than sitting on a full-size toilet. (Many toddlers are afraid of falling into the toilet, and their anxiety can interfere with potty training.)

If you prefer to buy an adapter seat for your regular toilet, make sure it's comfortable and attaches securely. Also, get a stool for your son so he can easily get on and off the potty any time he needs to go and also stabilize himself with his feet.

When buying a potty for your son, look for one without a urine guard (or with a removable one). Although they may protect your bathroom from a little stray pee, they also tend to scrape a boy's penis when he sits down on the potty, which could make him hesitant to use it.

You may want to show your son related [picture books](#) or videos to try to help him to grasp all this new information. *Everyone Poops*, by Taro Gomi, is a perennial favorite, as is *Uh, Oh! Gotta Go!*, by Bob McGrath and *Once Upon a Potty*, by Alona Frankel, which even comes in a version with a doll and a miniature potty.

Help your child get comfortable with the potty

Let your child get used to the idea of using the potty. Start by telling him that the potty is his very own. You can personalize it by writing his name on it or letting him decorate it with stickers. Then have him try sitting on it with his clothes on.

After he's practiced this way for a week or so, suggest that he try it out with his pants down. If he seems at all resistant, avoid the temptation to pressure him. That will only set up a power struggle that could derail the entire process.

If your child has a favorite doll or stuffed animal, use it for potty demonstrations. Most children enjoy watching their toy go through the motions, and your child may learn more this way than from you telling him what to do.

Some parents even construct a makeshift toilet for the doll or stuffed animal. While your child is perched on his potty, his toy can be sitting on one of its own.

Motivate him with cool underwear

Get your son focused on the benefits of being potty trained by taking him on a special errand to buy big boy underwear. Let him know that he gets to choose whatever kind he wants (animals or trains, briefs or boxers, whatever appeals).

Talk up the outing ahead of time so he gets excited about being old enough to use the potty and wear "real" underwear, just like his dad's or older brother's. If he seems a little hesitant to put them on, see if he'll wear them over his diaper. Once he gets used to them, he may insist on ditching the disposables.

Set up a training schedule

Getting your toddler out of diapers depends on your daily schedule and whether your son is in daycare or preschool. If he is, you'll want to coordinate your strategy with his daycare provider or teacher.

You'll have to decide whether to alternate between diapers and underpants, or just make the switch to underwear full time. Disposable training pants are convenient, but many experts and parents find it's best to transition right into underwear or old-fashioned cotton training pants, both of which enable your son to feel when he's wet right away. Of course, that means you'll be cleaning up some accidents.

When making your decision, consider what's best for you and your son. His doctor may recommend one method or the other. For a while, continue using diapers or disposable pants at night and when you're out and about. Your daycare provider or preschool teacher may have her own opinion on when to switch to underpants at school.

Teach him to sit first, then stand

Bowel movements and urine often come at the same time, so it makes sense to have your son sit down to poop and pee at first. That way, he learns that both go in the potty. He also won't get distracted by the fun of spraying and learning to aim when you need him to concentrate on mastering the basic procedure.

Avoid letting him sit too long (15 minutes is sufficient) or get sidetracked by other activities. Watching TV or using other screens while sitting on the potty is often a major stumbling block for parents and children.

Once your son is comfortable going to the bathroom sitting down, he can try it standing up. (There's no reason to rush this – he can continue to pee sitting down for as long as he likes.) This is where having a male role model is key.

Make sure your son can follow his dad, an uncle, or a good family friend into the bathroom to watch him pee standing up. When your son seems to get the idea, let him give it a try.

If he seems reluctant, try putting a few pieces of O-shaped cereal in the potty for target practice. Expect to clean up a few messes as your son perfects his aim. If you're not squeamish about letting him pee in the yard, you can paint or tape a target on a tree.

Set aside some naked time

Nothing helps your toddler figure out when he needs to go like letting him spend some time in the nude. Put the potty in an accessible area while he plays, and encourage him to sit on it at regular intervals.

(Of course if your son is going to play naked, be prepared for the floor to get wet. Have your child play in an area that won't be damaged by a little wetness or put plastic over the carpets and furniture.)

Watch for signs that he has to go – like clutching himself or jumping up and down in place – and use these cues to suggest that it might be potty time. You can do this on several consecutive days, in the evenings when the family is all together, or just on weekends. The more time your child spends out of diapers, the faster he'll learn.

Celebrate triumphs

Your son will undoubtedly have a few accidents, but eventually he will enjoy the accomplishment of getting something in the potty. Celebrate this moment with fanfare. Reinforce the idea that he's reached a significant milestone by rewarding him with a "big kid" privilege, such as watching a new video or a longer stay at the playground.

Try not to make a big deal out of every trip to the potty, or your child may start to feel nervous and self-conscious from all the attention.

If at first he doesn't succeed, try, try again

As with any other skill, the more he uses the potty, the better he'll be at it. But there are some things you can do to make it easier for him.

Dress your child in loose-fitting clothes that he can easily take off himself, or buy underpants a size too big.

If he still has trouble with potty training, don't overreact or punish. Nothing can disrupt potty training faster than making a child feel bad for having an accident.

If you feel frustrated, remind yourself that scolding your child for wetting his pants might mean months of diapers ahead. Remember, potty training is not so different from learning how to ride a bike, and accidents are an inevitable part of the process. Even children who have used the toilet successfully for months occasionally have an accident when they are engrossed in an activity.

And if you don't sense much progress or if you or your child are becoming frustrated, it's perfectly fine to take a break from potty training and try again in a few weeks.

Raise the fun factor

If you approach potty training with a little pizzazz, your child will be more likely to stay motivated.

Drip some blue food coloring into the potty. Your child will be amazed at how he can turn the water green. Put several of his favorite books in the magazine rack next to the toilet so he can look at them whenever he has to go. Or better yet, read to him (if it's not a distraction). Maybe he'd like to cut out shapes from toilet paper to use for target practice.

If your child starts to lose interest but is well into potty training, you may want to consider offering rewards.

Using stickers and a calendar to keep track of his successes is one popular method. Every time he goes to the potty, he gets a sticker that he can paste onto the page. Watching the stickers accumulate will keep him inspired.

If the stickers themselves aren't enough of a thrill, you can offer an additional reward, such as a treat from the candy aisle at the supermarket or a toy, when he earns enough stickers or stays dry for a certain number of days in a row.

Move into night mode

Once your son stays dry all day, you can start formulating a game plan for nights. Wait until he's reliably using the potty during the daytime, then start checking his diapers in the mornings and after naps to see if they're dry. Many children start staying dry during their afternoon naps within six months of learning to use the potty.

Nighttime training takes longer because it depends mostly on whether his body can hold the urine for an extended period of time. It can take months or years before your child's body is mature enough to stay dry at night, and this is perfectly normal. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 10 percent of 7-year-olds and 5 percent of 10-year-olds may still [wet the bed](#).

If he wants to try sleeping without diapers, go ahead and let him. If a few nights of this experiment show he's not ready, put him back in diapers in a nonjudgmental way. Tell him that his body is not quite ready for this next step, and reassure him that he'll soon be big enough to try again.

If your child stays dry three out of five nights, it's probably okay to make your official policy "all underwear, all the time." Support his attempts to stay dry by limiting how much he drinks after 5 p.m. and getting him up for a final trip to the bathroom before you go to bed. If your child takes longer to stay dry at night, don't worry – nighttime accidents are considered normal until well into the grade school years.

Ditch the diapers

By the time your child's ready to say goodbye to diapers altogether, he's accomplished a lot.

Acknowledge this, and reinforce your child's pride in his achievement by letting him give away leftover diapers to a family with younger kids or send them away with the diaper delivery service one last time. You also may want to join him in a joyful jig around the house and call it the "no more diapers" dance.