

Successful Potty Training for Girls

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You'll miss many things once your baby grows up, but changing dirty diapers is probably not one of them. Still, it doesn't pay to be in a hurry: Teaching your daughter how to use the potty requires time and patience on your part and a reasonable degree of cooperation and motivation on your child's.

Lucky for you, experts say girls potty train earlier than boys because girls aren't as easily distracted. Kids with older siblings to look up to and imitate may be easier to toilet train, too.

The key to potty training success is starting only when your daughter is truly able to do so. While some kids can start as young as 18 months, others may not be prepared to learn until they're 3 or 4.

There's no point trying to get a head start – studies show that when parents begin potty training before a child is physically or emotionally able, the process simply takes longer. In other words, you arrive at your destination at the same time, no matter when you start.

Once you've determined that your daughter is ready, focus on timing. Make sure your child's routine is well established – if she's just started at preschool or has a new sibling, she may be less receptive to change or feel too overwhelmed to tackle this new challenge.

Avoid periods when her natural toddler resistance is high, and wait until she seems open to new ideas.

Let her watch and learn

Toddlers learn by imitation, and watching you use the bathroom is a natural first step. When talking about body parts, it's important to be accurate. If you teach her to refer to her vaginal area as her "wee-wee" when every other part has a more formal-sounding name, she may infer that there's something embarrassing about her genitals.

If your daughter has seen her older brother, her father, or one of her friends from preschool or daycare stand tall at the toilet, she'll more than likely want to try to pee standing up. Let her. Sure, you'll have to clean up a couple of messes, but she'll probably get the idea fairly quickly that she doesn't have the equipment to make it work, and you won't have to engage her in a power struggle.

If she persists, have her watch you and explain how mommies and their daughters have to sit down to pee.

Buy the right equipment

Most experts advise buying a [child-size potty](#), which your toddler can feel is her own and which will also feel more secure to her than a full-size toilet. (Many children fear falling into the toilet, and their anxiety can interfere with potty training.) Bathrooms can be a dangerous place for curious toddlers so always supervise her when she's using the toilet.

If you prefer to buy an adapter seat for your regular toilet, make sure it feels comfy and secure and attaches firmly. If you go this route, you'll need to provide your daughter with a stool because it's important that she be able to maneuver her way on and off the toilet easily any time she needs to go. She also needs to be able to stabilize herself with her feet to push when she's having a bowel movement.

Help your child get comfortable with the potty

This early in the process, your child needs to get used to the idea of using the potty. Start by letting her know that the potty chair is her very own.

You can personalize it by writing her name on it or letting her decorate it with stickers. Then have her try sitting on it with her clothes on.

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

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

Some parents even construct a makeshift toilet for the doll or stuffed animal. Then while your child is perched on her chair, her favorite toy can be sitting on its own potty.

Motivate with cool underwear

Get your daughter focused on the benefits of being potty trained by taking her on a special errand: Buying panties. Let her know that she gets to choose whatever kind she wants. (Underwear featuring a favorite movie character or bright design is usually a big hit.)

Talk up the outing ahead of time so she gets excited about being old enough to use the potty and wear underwear just like mommy or her big sister.

Set up a training schedule

Getting your toddler out of diapers will depend on your daily schedule and whether your daughter is in daycare or preschool. If she is, you'll want to coordinate your strategy with her daycare provider or teacher.

You'll have to decide whether to use the back-and-forth method of switching between diapers and panties or the cold-turkey method of going to underwear full-time. Some experts recommend making the move to disposable training pants, which are essentially like diapers but can be pulled up and down like underwear.

But others disagree, saying it's best to transition right into underwear or old-fashioned cotton training pants, both of which will allow your daughter to feel when she's wet right away. That, of course, makes it more likely that you'll be cleaning up some accidents.

You'll have to decide what's best for you and your child. Your child's doctor may recommend one way or the other.

For a while at least, you'll want to continue using diapers at night. And your daycare provider or preschool teacher may have her own opinion on when to switch to panties at school.

Teach her to sit and wipe

One of the most important things you'll need to teach your daughter is how to wipe properly. Explain that she needs to make sure she moves the toilet paper from front to back, especially when she has a bowel movement, to avoid getting an infection.

If this seems too complicated for her to grasp (and it can be for many girls because it requires having to remember to go in a certain direction), teach her to pat the area dry after she pees.

Bladder infections, while uncommon, seem to be more likely in girls around the time of potty training. If your daughter needs to urinate frequently or feels a sudden need to go, says it hurts, complains of abdominal pain, or starts to wet her pants after having established good bladder control, call her doctor and have it checked out.

Set aside some naked time

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

Watch for signs that she has to go (jumping up and down in place, clutching her legs together, or swaying from side to side), using these cues to suggest it's 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 she'll learn.

Celebrate triumphs

She will undoubtedly have a few accidents, but eventually your daughter will know the accomplishment of getting something in the potty. Celebrate this moment with fanfare. Reinforce the idea that she's reached a significant milestone by rewarding her with a "big kid" privilege such as getting an extra bedtime story.

But try not to make a big deal of *every* trip to the potty or else your child will start to feel nervous and self-conscious under the glare of all that attention.

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

As with any other skill, the more she uses the potty, the better she'll be at it. But there are some things you can do to make it easier for her. Dress your child in loose-fitting clothes that she can easily take off herself, or buy panties a size too big.

If she still has trouble with the concept, don't overreact or punish. Nothing can disrupt potty training faster than making a child feel bad for having an accident. Accidents are normal and part of the process.

Keep in mind that even children who have used the toilet successfully for months occasionally have accidents when they are engrossed in an activity. If you feel frustrated, remind yourself that scolding her for wetting her pants might mean months of diapers ahead.

And if you're both frustrated, take a break for a few weeks then try again when you're ready.

Increase the fun factor

If you approach potty training with a little panache, your child will be more likely to stay motivated throughout the entire process. Drip some blue food coloring into the toilet and she'll be amazed at how she can turn the water green. Or put her favorite book in the magazine rack next to the toilet so she can look through it whenever she has to go.

If your child starts to lose interest when she's well into potty training, you may want to consider offering rewards. One popular method is to use stickers and a calendar to keep track of her successes.

Every time she goes to the potty, she gets to paste a sticker of her choice on the page. Watching the sticker bounty accumulate will keep her inspired.

If the stickers themselves aren't enough of a thrill, you can offer an additional reward such as a trip to the playground or a wished-for toy when she amasses enough stickers or stays dry for a certain number of days in a row.

Move into night mode

Once your daughter gets the hang of daytime training, you're ready to move into the next phase. Wait until she's securely potty trained, then start checking her diapers in the mornings and after naps to see whether they're dry. Many children start staying dry during their afternoon naps within about six months of learning to use the toilet.

Nighttime training is trickier because it depends on her body being able to hold the urine for an extended period of time and how deeply she sleeps. If she wants to try sleeping without diapers, go ahead and let her. If you're worried about her soiling the mattress, an absorbent mattress cover can help.

If, after a few nights of this experiment, she's clearly not ready to stay dry, put her back in diapers in a non-judgmental way. Tell her that her body is not quite able to tackle this next step, and reassure her that she'll soon be big enough to try again.

If your child stays dry three out of five nights, make your "all underwear, all the time" policy official. Support her attempts to stay dry by restricting how much she drinks after 5 p.m. and getting her up for a bathroom trip before you go to bed.

Ditch the diapers

By the time your child's ready to say goodbye to diapers altogether, she's accomplished a lot. Acknowledge this and reinforce her pride in her achievement by letting her give away her leftover diapers to a family with younger kids, or by packing up the cloth diapers and sending them away with the diaper delivery service one last time.

Or assist her in choreographing a joyful jig around the house and call it the "no more diapers" dance. The entire family can form a makeshift conga line and head to the potty when nature calls.