



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Toilet Training

Potty training is one of the most important demonstrations of a child's independence - and can be one of the most challenging tasks of parenthood. Unsolicited advice from relatives, popular yet unrealistic training methods, and preschools requiring children to be toilet trained may only increase the pressure many parents feel.

Yet no matter how much a parent may want his or her child to master toilet training, kids will not use the potty until they are ready and willing. That's why potty training requires time, consistency, flexibility, and a lot of humor and patience.

## Is My Child Ready?

A child's physical and emotional readiness determines potty training success, not a specific age. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, there is no set age at which toilet training should begin. Many children show signs of being ready between 18 and 24 months of age, but some children may not be ready until 30 months or older. This is normal.

The Academy of Pediatrics says the following signs may indicate your child is ready:

- Your child stays dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day or is dry after naps.
- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- You can tell when your child is about to urinate or have a bowel movement.
- Your child can follow simple instructions.
- Your child can walk to and from the bathroom and help undress themselves.

- Your child seems uncomfortable with soiled diapers and wants to be changed.
- Your child asks to use the toilet or potty chair.
- Your child asks to wear "big-kid" underwear.

If you answered mostly yes, your child may be ready for potty training. If the answer is mostly no, then you may want to wait and revisit it in a few months. If your family is facing major changes, like the arrival of a new baby or a move, you might consider waiting while your child gets used to the transition.

## Toilet Training Tips - Getting Started

**Take your time.** A simple internet search yields countless fee-based methods that promise to train your child in three days or less. These programs may work for some families, but it is important to be realistic about time expectations. Also, keep in mind that these programs don't consider your child's temperament or individuality. There is no one-size fits all method to potty training. Whatever method you use, it should be flexible and work for the whole family.

**Be consistent.** Make sure all of your child's caregivers — including babysitters, child care providers and grandparents — follow your potty-training routine.

**Be positive.** Be positive even when a trip to the toilet isn't successful. Even if your child simply sits there, offer praise for trying — and remind your child that he or she can try again later.

**Consider incentives.** Some children respond well to incentives such as stickers. It is best to avoid food incentives. Find what works best for your child. Gradually phase out the rewards as your child's visits to the bathroom become routine.

**Teach good hygiene.** Remember the importance of good hygiene. Teach girls to wipe carefully from front to back to prevent bringing germs from the rectum to the vagina or bladder. Make sure both boys and girls learn to wash their hands after using the toilet

**Read books together about potty training.** *Everyone Poops*, by Taro Gomi, is a perennial favorite, as is *Uh, Oh! Gotta Go!* and *Once Upon a Potty*.

**Be realistic about your child staying dry at night.** While your child may achieve staying dry during the day by 3 to 4 years old, most children are able to stay dry at night after 5 years of age. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, about 40 percent of 3 year olds are affected by bed-wetting (or enuresis). For many children, bladder control at night comes much later and does not necessarily signify any medical problem.

**Know when to call it quits.** If your child resists using the potty chair or toilet or simply doesn't get the hang of it, take a break. He or she may not be ready yet. Try it again in a few months. If your child isn't interested in potty training by age 3, you might ask your child's doctor for suggestions.

## When Accidents Happen

Once your child is toilet trained, accidents may still happen. The Mayo Clinic offers these tips to help you handle - or prevent - wet pants:

**Stay calm.** Kids don't have accidents to irritate their parents. Don't add to the embarrassment by scolding or disciplining your child. You may say, "You forgot this time. Next time you'll get to the bathroom sooner."

**Slow down.** Remind your child to relax and take it slowly. Completely emptying the bladder can help prevent accidents.

**Offer reminders.** Accidents often happen when kids are absorbed in activities that — for the moment — are more interesting than using the toilet. To fight this phenomenon, suggest regular bathroom trips, such as first thing in the morning, after each meal and snack, and before getting in the car or going to bed. Point out telltale signs of holding it, such as fidgeting or holding the genital area.

**Be prepared.** If your child has frequent accidents, absor-

bent underwear may be best. Keep a change of underwear and clothing handy, especially at school or in child care.

## Toilet Training Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics

**Decide which words to use.** Choose the words your family will use to describe body parts, urine, and bowel movements. Remember that other people will hear these words too, so pick words that will not offend, confuse, or embarrass anyone. Avoid negative words like "dirty," "naughty," or "stinky." They can make your child feel ashamed and embarrassed. Talk about bowel movements and urination in a simple, matter-of-fact manner.

**Pick a potty chair.** A potty chair is easier for a small child to use because there is no problem getting onto it and a child's feet can reach the floor. Special books or toys for "potty time" may help make this more enjoyable for your child.

**Know the signs.** Before having a bowel movement, your child may grunt or make other straining noises, squat, or stop playing for a moment. When pushing, his face may turn red. Explain to your child that these signs mean that a bowel movement is about to come. Your child may wait until after the fact to tell you about a wet diaper or a bowel movement. This is actually a good sign that your child is starting to recognize these body functions. Praise your child for telling you, and suggest that "next time" he let you know in advance. Keep in mind that it often takes longer for a child to recognize the need to urinate than the need to move bowels.

**Try training pants.** Once your child starts using the potty with some success, training pants can be used. This moment will be special. Your child will feel proud of this sign of growing up. However, be prepared for "accidents."

Source: *Toilet Training* (Copyright © 2009 American Academy of Pediatrics) Published online: 9/09

## Learn More

Potty training tips for children with special needs: [http://pediatrics.about.com/cs/parentingadvice/a/sp\\_needs\\_potty\\_2.htm](http://pediatrics.about.com/cs/parentingadvice/a/sp_needs_potty_2.htm)

Books for children about potty training: [http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/pa/pa\\_blttoilet\\_pep.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/pa/pa_blttoilet_pep.htm)

## About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)