

Children's Services

Toilet Training

Learning to use the toilet is a big step for toddlers. While some seem to almost 'train themselves', others find it very hard to learn. This fact sheet provides some information and tips on toileting, and tells you where to seek help if there is a problem.

It's important to relax – expect accidents and resistance sometimes but do not punish your toddler if this happens. If they become anxious and fearful it can delay toilet training. Also avoid using events such as moving house or the birth of a new baby to 'timetable' toilet training. Allow your toddler – rather than your expectations – to set the pace.

How do I know when my toddler is ready?

By the age of 18 months, most toddlers are aware of having done a 'wee' or a 'poo' in their nappy. Signs of readiness for toilet training include:

- age – somewhere between 18 months and three years
- curiosity – watching you or an older
- sibling use the toilet
- longer periods of dryness – eg they are
- dry when they wake from a nap
- removing or not wanting to wear nappies
- telling you they are doing a 'wee' or a 'poo' – especially before they do it.

Potties or toilets?

There are some things to consider when deciding whether to use a toilet or a potty.

- A potty will only be used for a short time – buying a toddlers' toilet seat and a stool for the regular toilet might be more economical.
- Potties need cleaning each time they're used and regular sanitising.
- Sometimes potty-trained toddlers can be afraid to use a toilet and this makes toileting difficult when you're out and don't have the potty with you.
- Potties however can be taken to any room in the house.

Asking your toddler what they prefer can encourage them to use the toilet or potty more.

Getting started...

To minimise stress for you and your toddler, choose a time when there isn't a lot happening – such as moving house, starting childcare etc. You need to devote time to toilet training. Here are a few suggestions to get you underway:

- Two weeks beforehand, choose the words you'll use (eg 'I see you've done a wee-wee') – and use them consistently. This helps your toddler identify body functions. Make sure all the people who care for your toddler (partner, grandparent/s, day care carers etc) are familiar with the words and routines and signs your toddler has for toileting.
- Talk with your toddler about what you would like them to do ('when you need to go to the toilet come and tell me and I can help you').
- Let them watch you use the toilet and explain what you are doing. Encourage your toddler to sit on the potty while you are on the toilet, so they can see that it's not a scary thing to do. Reassure them that they can't fall in – and that there are no monsters in the toilet!



Continued over page

Page 1 of 2

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continued

- Use underpants, 'pull ups' or training pants during the day but toddlers will still need a nappy for rest/sleep times and at night. Dress them in clothes that are easy to get off – avoid overalls or pants with suspenders, zips, buttons and belts.
- Ask them regularly if they need to use the toilet and watch for signs that they do (excessive fidgeting, holding on etc).
- Don't make your toddler sit on the toilet or potty until they do something. This will feel like punishment and could make them reluctant to sit on the toilet in future. If your toddler flatly refuses to use the toilet, they might be tired or not interested in using the toilet at that moment. Try again an hour or so later.
- Don't be discouraged if things don't improve in a week – instead try again in a few weeks when your toddler might be more ready.
- Praise your toddler's success – no matter how small ('Great job getting your pants down all by yourself'). A reward, such as a stamp or sticker, can encourage them.
- You will need to help them to wipe their bottoms at first, but encourage and praise all efforts to wipe themselves – and to wash their hands afterwards.
- Pretend to place a favourite toy – such as a teddy bear – onto the potty or toilet ('Look Sarah, Rupert is using the potty. When he's finished you might like to try using it too').
- An object such as a ping pong ball in the toilet bowl gives boys something to aim at – a fun way to encourage them.
- Toddlers might not be able to 'hold on' to a wee that is ready to come out – they're often too busy playing and so don't notice the signs their bodies are giving them.
- 'Poo' training can happen before 'wee' training, because generally poo takes longer to be eliminated from the body, giving your toddler time to make it to the toilet. It can take months to get wee trained.

Expect some setbacks...

Each toddler is different and will develop at a different rate to other children. Some get the hang of toilet training early, and some will need lots of reassurance and practice before they are fully toilet trained. Some master toileting then regress, but this is normal and can be caused by different events or changes in routine. Here are some suggestions that might help with toileting setbacks:

- Stay calm and avoid becoming angry – your toddler isn't deliberately trying to annoy you. Reassure them that everything is ok, that accidents don't matter. Go at your toddler's pace – rushing just adds to the pressure.
- A toddler who has lots of accidents may not be ready to start toilet training. It's ok to stop and start again in a few weeks.
- Praise all attempts at using the toilet, even when not successful. Toddlers can easily sense when you are frustrated, which might discourage them from trying.

Physical problems and where to get help

Sometimes a physical problem such as constipation or a urinary tract infection can lead to toilet training problems. Illnesses can also cause a small tear in the bowel, which might cause pain and discomfort and make your toddler want to hold on. This increases the chances of having an accident and could require medical help.

Toddlers might have a urinary infection if:

- they are urinating often
- they experience pain or discomfort when urinating
- there is blood in the urine
- the urine changes in smell
- they are aged four or over and are still having accidents during the day.

If you think your child has a physical problem that causes frequent accidents or you would like more information, contact:

- your family doctor or paediatrician
- a Child & Family Health nurse
- the Tresillian Parenting Help Line (phone 1800 637 357)
- Centacare's Parent Line (phone 13 20 55).

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