

Toilet Ready?

How to know when your child is ready to use the potty

Parents need to know the signs that will tell them when their child is ready to move out of diapers and start to use the toilet.

Most children are not ready for the potty until they are at least 2 years old. And a few aren't completely ready until they are 3 or 4 years old.

To be successful at using the potty, children have to feel the urge to go, know what the urge means, hold off on going, get to the toilet, remove their clothing, sit on the toilet, and relax enough to go.

Until a child is physically or mentally mature enough to do all of those things, he or she isn't ready to use the potty.

So don't be rushed by friends or relatives who think you should begin potty training when your child isn't ready.

It is better for you and your child that you wait.

On Back

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You & Your Child



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The beginning of awareness

Between the ages of 12 and 18 months, you may notice your toddler pausing or changing his or her expression when having a bowel movement. This is a sign that your child is becoming aware of the process of going.

Later Signs of Readiness

Play is interrupted

Between 18-24 months of age, your child may stop playing when making a bowel movement. It's helpful to give this whole process a name, like "potty." If you label the behavior when it's happening, your child may come to use the word to tell you that he or she is going.

Your child wants to be changed

Your child, either with words or gestures, will tell you that he or she wants to be changed. Later, your child may show an interest in being clean and want to go to the potty to avoid needing to be changed.

Stays dry longer

When children stay dry for 2 hours or longer, it means they are gaining control over their bladder muscles. This usually happens after 18 months of age.

Your child says he or she is ready

Some children may show an interest in how adults and older children use the toilet, and want to be a "big boy" or a "big girl" by imitating them.

Imitation can be effective, if you are comfortable letting your child watch adults or older children.

Some children recognize and announce that they need to go by saying "potty." Then, all that is left is to get to the potty on time.

Reasons to wait

Some parents try to potty train very early. For example, they may try to put their infant on the potty when they think the child has to go. This is called "catching." But there are good reasons not to push your child too early.

- If you manage to "catch" your child before he or she goes, it may seem like early potty training is working. But the child really isn't going to the potty on his or her own. And when your child fails to make it to the potty, you may both feel frustrated.
- Even if children don't understand why they are being put on the potty, they sense that they are expected to do something. Children don't like to disappoint, and after a long wait, they may feel bad when they don't do what you want.
- Children who start training early usually are not able to control their bowels or their bladders any earlier than children who start training at a later age.
- Parents who start their child on the potty early usually end up spending more time potty training than parents who start their children when they are ready.
- Pushing your child to learn to use the potty too early may make him or her anxious. This may lead to more accidents or delays in learning to use the potty.
- Toddlers want independence and control. If they are not mentally or physically mature enough to use the potty, pressuring them may encourage them to rebel by refusing to use the potty.

