

A to Z of Potty Training Tips

Age

There is no right age to potty train, as natural readiness varies from child to child. Children gain bowel and bladder control at their own pace, but most are potty trained somewhere between the ages of 2 and 3 years, for others it can take a little longer.



Be positive

Be very positive about every step your child makes during the potty training process – reward him for bringing his potty into the room, or sitting on it. Don't worry about whether or not he's performing on it initially. This will come in time. You just want him to be relaxed around the potty and happy to sit on it to begin with.

Consistent

You will be disappointed if you try to potty train in just one day; it can take half a day to simply introduce your child to the potty, but it will take much longer for significant progress to be made and for your child to use the potty without help. Of course, you still have a busy life to lead, but it is important to be consistent and ensure you have the time and flexibility to concentrate on potty training.



Drinking

Encourage your child to drink six to eight cups of drink (water based drinks are best) spread over a day.

Encourage

Encourage your child to sit on the potty a short while after a drink. Try to sit him on the potty every couple of hours but don't keep him sitting there for more than a couple of minutes each time. If he asks for the potty in-between then that's great. If your child has a regular pattern for pooing, try sitting him on the potty to coincide with his natural rhythm.



Friends and family

It's often the case that friends will tell you their child was dry at an early age, or for your family to encourage you to get on with potty training. It's best to resist these pressures and to wait until your child shows signs of readiness before starting potty training. Potty training is a milestone like any other in a child's development and each child is unique, they will be ready in their own time.

Gentle reminders and prompts

Children enjoy being praised when they sit on the potty whether or not they have managed to have a wee or poo in it. When they do finally have a wee or poo it's often cause for great celebration and children enjoy the praise and fuss surrounding each success. You'll need to continue giving gentle reminders and prompts until your child is reliably dry and independent. For an added incentive to use the potty you may wish to consider buying a musical potty which is activated when a child wees – the insert available from ERIC has the added bonus of playing a variety of tunes or you can record a message.



Help your child feel proud

When the inevitable accidents occur, try to simply clean up and change pants without any fuss. Give lots of praise at each success on the potty so that your child feels proud of himself and his achievements.

Independence

As children become more independent and the focus goes off potty training, it can sometimes seem they take a backwards step and start having occasional accidents again. Many children become so involved in play that they can simply forget about using the potty; continue giving gentle reminders and prompts at these times and with a little gentle persuasion they will soon overcome this hurdle.



Just before starting to potty train

Before you start to potty train your child, talk to him about what you are going to do and make a special trip with him to buy a potty and pants. Now is a good time to get some picture books about potty training and read them together (available from ERIC). Decide what you're going to call wee and poo and let everyone involved in your child's care know that you are potty training so that there is a consistent approach.

Keeping focused

Some children seem to potty train with great ease, but others can take a while to master all the skills needed to gain bladder and bowel control. Like any stage of a child's development, bladder and bowel control is achieved at the child's own pace. If a child starts potty training before he is ready then it is inevitable that he will take longer to potty train than a child who is showing signs of readiness. If you feel your child is not quite ready, simply delay potty training for a few weeks and then try again – it may go more smoothly the next time.

Loss of interest

If your child seems to have lost interest in potty training you could try inspiring him afresh. Perhaps taking him to choose a new potty, or letting him put reward stickers onto the potty each time he sits on it. Ensure your child continues to receive lots of praise for using the potty and think of ways to change the routine so he is more focussed on using it.



Moving on to the toilet

Using a potty is the best way to start for most children as it is easy to get on and off and can be moved around. The eventual aim of potty training will be for your child to use the toilet. For many children there is a natural progression to using the toilet, but for others it may take a while to progress.

You will need a step high enough to help your child get up to the toilet and to rest their feet on when sitting on the toilet - this is especially important for pooing. A

child's toilet seat that fits inside the usual toilet seat can be useful to help your child to feel secure.



Boys will often wish to copy their dads or older brothers and wee standing up. It's inevitable this will result in spraying around the toilet and you may choose to minimise the mess by adding some toilet balls to improve aim in the toilet. When boys do start standing to wee, it is important to ensure they have a daily routine for sitting on the toilet for a poo. If time to poo is not included in the daily routine it can get forgotten and can lead to constipation.

Nursery

Take time to let your all child's carers know that you have started to potty train – this will ensure consistency in your approaches. If your child goes to nursery, see what potty the nursery uses – it may help if you get the same one for home, so it looks familiar. You may choose to discuss potty training with your nursery before starting so they can help your child be prepared.



Overcoming the need for a nappy to have a poo

It isn't unusual for a child to ask for a nappy when he wants a poo; it's a common request at this stage. But, don't despair; this is a good time to properly address it.

Some children will simply accept that there are no more nappies, but for others you will need to find ways to encourage sitting and pooing on the potty. Many children will have a regular pattern to their pooing; if this is the case encourage your child to sit on the potty at their usual poo time.

Other children will wriggle around and some will simply ask for the nappy when they know they need a poo – try to encourage them to sit on the potty, before putting on the nappy.

If these suggestions don't work, ensure the nappies are kept and used in the toilet area; try sitting your child on the potty with his nappy on and when he is happy to

poo this way, you can see if he'll let you take the nappy off. If he is reluctant to remove it, you could make a hole in the back of the nappy so the poo can drop through. Once achieved, a poo in the potty is a time of celebration, with plenty of praise and a wave goodbye to poo as it is emptied down the toilet on its way "poo-land"!

Potty plans

Letting your child help choose a potty is a good idea. Talk about it, plan a trip to the shops – and make it a special adventure for the two of you. Make sure the potty is comfortable, has a good base and won't tip.

You may wish to consider buying a musical potty insert which is activated when a child wees – the one available from ERIC has the added bonus of playing a number of tunes or a recorded message. Plan where you're going to put the potty in advance, keep it in the same room, and if possible, in the same place so it's easy to find.

Your child will feel more secure about the potty if he knows where it is. Whatever room you choose for the potty, put some toys and books in there and keep the environment pleasant, and relaxed.



Questions?

If you have any questions about potty training, just ask ERIC. The ERIC Helpline is available weekdays between 10am-4pm on 0845 370 8008.



Reading the signs

Is your child able to stay dry in his nappy for 1½ to 2 hours? Is he excited at seeing his wee make a fountain when having a bath? Is he keen to have his nappy off and wear pants like a big boy? Does he wiggle around when he needs a poo or wee? Is he interested in what you do on the toilet? All of these are signs of readiness to be potty trained. Now it's also good time to get some picture books about potty training and read them together (available from ERIC).

Signs of readiness include managing to stay dry for 1½ - 2 hours between each wee; showing awareness of weeing or pooing by perhaps stopping and concentrating or telling you what they are doing; having developed the ability to understand and respond to simple instructions such as 'do you need a wee?' or 'find your potty' and to get on and off the potty with only a little help.

Try to avoid potty training if your toddler is going through a resistant 'no' stage: it'll be easier if your child enjoys praise and shows a desire to please and cooperate.

Stay positive

There will be accidents, be prepared for regular pant changing during the early stages of potty training. If you remain calm and make potty training fun and give lots of praise and encouragement, potty training is likely to be a positive experience for both of you.



Time to share

If your child gets up and runs away from the potty each time you sit him on it, stay calm. Try to make the time he sits on the potty a special time, just for the two of you. You can sing a favourite rhyme, or read a book together. Always be positive when you talk about the potty.



Up, up and away

It's inevitable that you will not be able to stay indoors the whole time you are potty training and at some time you will need to venture out without the safety of a nappy on your child. When you are out and about you may choose to use washable training pants (available from ERIC), disposable training pants, or perhaps simply use ordinary cotton pants. It is important to continue to take your child to the toilet when out and about even with training pants on. You may consider carrying a collapsible portable potty as they are discreet and easy to carry.

Visiting the shops

Make a special visit to the shops and let your child choose his own set of pants, perhaps with a TV or cartoon character on it. If he feels proud of his new big boy pants, he will be keen to keep them clean and dry. If you chose to use pull ups in the early days when you are out and about you could try putting his cotton pants on underneath so that if your child starts to wee, he'll feel wet and be more aware.

Wiping

It will be a while before your child will be able to wipe his bum independently after a poo. It is a complicated process and very young children haven't yet mastered the coordination skills. You can start to develop the skills needed for wiping by letting your child attempt to wipe after you have cleaned him up. Don't forget to wash his hands. Girls should always wipe from front to back.

Xtra fun

When boys start to stand at the toilet to wee, it can take a while for them to perfect their aim into the toilet. It can help a boy's aim as well as be fun, to put table tennis balls or toilet balls (available from ERIC) in the water to aim at.

You two

Make sure potty training is a fun and relaxed time for both of you. There will be accidents, but be patient – go at your child's own pace. For some children, potty training happens quickly and smoothly, but for others it can take a while. If you feel things are not progressing you may choose to put the nappies back on and try again in a few weeks when your child is ready.



Zips and buttons

Avoid clothes that are difficult for you or your child to remove in a hurry such as dungarees or trousers with zips and buttons. You need clothes that are easy to pull down quickly. Your child will also eventually need to be able to pull his own trousers down – so the easier, the better.



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