

Potty Training Overview

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Stage	What child knows / can do that shows they are ready	What you can do to help them move to the next stage
Body Awareness ~ 16 months	Knows words for body parts Knows words for urine and bowel movement Aware after : know they HAVE peed or pooped	Teach vocabulary, in a matter-of-fact way. Do not use negative language or imply body parts/products are disgusting or bad Help them notice when they have eliminated by commenting on it
Potty Awareness 18 – 24 months	Like to imitate others in a variety of daily activities Understands that all things have a proper place they belong in AND understands pee/poop belong in the potty Shows interest in the potty and in trying the potty	Role model what you want them to learn: toileting, handwashing Help them put things like toys and clothes away in the proper place Show them how you can dump poop from diaper into toilet Get a potty – let them explore it Take doll to the potty, read books about toileting
Practicing 20 – 30 months	Has the motor skills to get onto the potty with help Can help some with getting their clothes off Can hold urine (keep diaper dry) for two hours Poops (bowel movements) at predictable times Aware during : they know they ARE peeing or pooping	Sit on the potty with their clothes on Sit on potty with their clothes off, no expectation they'll pee or poop Go pants-free (and socks free) with a potty nearby so if they start peeing, they can go sit on potty. (Works best outdoors) Put them on potty first thing in the morning when they're likely to pee Look for poop opportunities... when you think they are about to poop, or they are pooping, take them to the potty Respond to any success with smiles and gentle praise, but no scolding if they don't produce anything in the potty or if they wet/soil diaper
Potty Training 30 – 48 months	Can take clothes off and use potty with some help Can keep diaper / underwear dry and clean for most of a day, with regular reminders to use the potty Aware before : know they need to go but may get distracted	Help them learn how to undress, how to use potty, wipe, wash hands Help them notice their cues and remind them to take action Reminders - Suggest potty several times a day Respond to accidents calmly –comment that you noticed it and clean up (or ask them to help you clean up). No punishment or shaming. Transitioning to underwear can be gradual, or a “big day” approach
Toileting Independently 60% by 36 months 98% by 48 months	Aware before and know what to do : They know what to do, can hold pee or poop till they're on toilet Can take clothes off and put them on independently Can toilet independently in the daytime (may need help wiping after a BM till age 5) Can stay dry overnight (90% by age 6)	Help them plan ahead – use bathroom before leaving home, know where bathroom is at school, how to ask teacher to use it Teach boys to pee standing up Teach them how to clean their genitals at bath time Explain symptoms to report (pain on urination, constipation, diarrhea) Teach consent, private parts

Potty Training vs. Toilet Learning

Potty training is the common name, but using the phrase toilet learning helps you to remember that this is something the child needs to *learn*. They need to learn to recognize cues that they need to go, they need to know how to get undressed and use the toilet, and they need to decide to do so. The parent's role is teach the child the skills they need and create an environment which enables them to move to toilet use when they're ready.

When Should You Start? How Long Will It Take?

In the table, you'll find age estimates for when the average child reaches each stage, but many things affect when any given child is ready: gender, temperament, the opportunity to observe other children toileting, disabilities, neurodiversity, and more. If you're wondering when to start, use the table to assess their current capabilities, then try ideas to help them move to the next stage. The more ready they are, the faster and easier it will be.

Other factors that affect timing: you may need to start earlier and push through more quickly if you need to get them potty trained to start preschool, or you want / need to reduce how many diapers you are using. On the flip side, you may decide to wait a while to work on potty training if you are managing other family challenges right now – such as when you're busy at work, about to move, or just had a new baby.

Vocabulary: Talking about Bodies and Elimination

To learn about toileting, children need to have the language to talk about it: teach words like potty, pee, poop. Teach correct medical terms – we can use words like penis, vulva and anus as matter-of-factly as we talk about their elbows. (Knowing the right words helps them talk to health care providers and also reduces the risk of sexual abuse.) Avoid negative language or implying that body parts / products are disgusting or shameful.

Teaching Private Parts / Consent / Bodily Autonomy

The ways you talk about these topics now lays a foundation for your child knowing you're a resource for information on health, self care, sexuality, and relationships as they get older. When they view you as an "askable parent" you can answer their questions in ways that align with your family's values.

Some messages you might share: Explain private parts – the parts that a swimsuit covers. Explain: "No one should show you theirs, ask to see yours, touch yours, ask you to touch theirs, show you photos or take photos of private parts." (If parents or doctors need to touch them to keep children healthy, they should ask permission.) You might say "You can touch your own private parts – it's your body! But we save that for in private."

You can teach more broadly about consent. Possible messages: For ALL kinds of touch (hugs, kisses, holding hands) – ask before touching – if they say no, or don't answer – don't touch. If others ask if they can touch you, you can say no. If someone touches you without asking, you can ask them to stop. We can model this and practice it at home. For example, asking before you start a tickle fight or wrestling match, pausing in the middle to check that they're still having fun, and stopping if they ask you to. Don't force them to give hugs or kisses – suggest alternatives like waves or high fives.