

up on your anxiety or frustration

- Try to ensure that using the potty is a pleasant experience. Don't let it become associated with being told off
- Dress him or her in easily managed clothes, for example shorts or underpants with elastic waistbands
- Don't pick a time when there is something else significant going on in the child's life, for example, starting a new nursery or moving house etc

When should I see a doctor?

Patience, understanding and a lot of positive reinforcement can deal with most

difficulties with potty training. However, if your child is over the age of three and has been trying to use the potty for more than six months without much success, you should arrange to see your doctor, with your child, to exclude possible medical causes and get further advice. You should also see your doctor if your child stubbornly refuses to open their bowels and develops chronic constipation. In this situation, your doctor will examine your child to rule out medical causes and may then recommend a regular "bowel programme" to get the bowel moving again.

Potty training

Potty training is teaching your toddler to gain control of their urine and bowel movements. Toddlers are taught to use a potty because it is easier for them to use than a toilet. Potty training is part of helping your child develop the ability to manage their toilet hygiene independently.

What does potty training involve?

Toddlers in nappies are accustomed to urinating and moving their bowels whenever they feel the urge to do so. Potty training involves a child learning to recognise the feeling of needing to go to the toilet, communicating their need of a potty, controlling their urine and bowel movements until they can get to a potty, and at a later stage, managing to remove their own clothes and pants. It is not surprising therefore that many children can have difficulty with potty training.

When can I start potty training?

Children develop at different rates, and you should only begin potty training when your child is ready. Most are ready for potty training at some time between 18 months and two and a half years of age, with girls often being

ready before boys.

By the age of three, nearly all children are able to control their bladder and bowels during the day. Becoming dry at night may come at the same time, but commonly a child may reach the age of six before they are completely dry every night. See separate factsheet on *bed-wetting* (nocturnal enuresis) for more information.

How will I know when my child is ready?

It is important not to rush your child into potty training merely because of their age, because friends' children are trained or because the nursery or nanny says the child should be trained by now - these pressures will only lead to problems later. Having said this,

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there are a number of signs you can look out for:

- Your child understands and uses the family term for filling their nappy, eg: wee or poo,
- They hold themselves when they need to go to the toilet,
- He or she shows signs of holding on at least for a short period of time,
- Fussing for a clean nappy immediately after filling it,
- He or she starts going off by him or herself for privacy when filling their nappy.

Getting started

When you see these signs, start teaching them what a toilet is and what it is used for. You may wish for them to observe you as parents or older siblings while they use it.

When you buy the potty you may find it helpful to take your toddler with you and, if possible, let them choose their favourite. Some people claim more success with a potty that plays music in response to urine.

Explain to your toddler that the potty is his or her own toilet and keep it within easy reach.

Over the next week or so, help your child become comfortable with the potty, for example, by letting them sit on it without their nappy while watching television or looking at books or while you tell them a story. Whilst

you want your child to be completely comfortable with the potty, you can remind your toddler what the potty is for or they may just get used to it being another chair.

Next steps

After a week or so you can start encouraging your toddler to sit on the potty whenever they show signs of wanting to go. You can also begin establishing a routine of sitting your child on the potty about twenty minutes after meals. After removing the nappy you should encourage them to sit on the potty for a short period and to try to go. If they can't or won't go, try engaging them in a fun activity such as telling a story. If they don't go after about five minutes, have them get up off the potty.

Always give your child lots of praise for their effort in sitting on the potty.

Your child is likely to learn to urinate in the potty first, as bowel movements require a little more control. After a successful sit on the potty, you may want to give your child a small treat and a period of play without pants to enhance their feeling of independence.

Once your child is able to communicate when they need to go, they can begin to wear training pants, and wear nappies only when they sleep.

When he or she has become accustomed to using the potty regularly, you should start to teach them to wipe

their own bottom and wash their hands, although this may come much later.

Dealing with difficulties

One of the main causes of difficulties is trying to train a child too early. If some of the signs are there, but you are having no success at all, then it is probably best to stop using the potty for a month or two. Make sure to explain to your toddler what is happening and help them maintain a positive association with the potty.

There may be times, even after a successful period of using the potty, when your toddler may require a nappy. Although this may be frustrating for you and them, it is vital that you keep praising and encouraging their efforts and help them to understand that success normally follows practice.

Pressuring your child to go, or reprimanding them for accidents or lack of success, will only mean they develop an unhappy association with the potty, which can take a great deal of time and effort to reverse. It is quite common for a child to become unco-operative or turn using the potty into a battle of wills. This becomes more likely if your child senses that you are anxious or frustrated about it. If you find yourself in this situation, you need to relax heightened tensions between you before you try again. This will take a great deal of effort on your part and it

may seem like your child is getting his or her own way. However, your toddler will become increasingly uncomfortable with soiling their nappies and is likely to seek a way to return to the potty in their own time and way.

If your child stubbornly refuses to cooperate, putting your child in situations where they will see other children their age who are also using the potty throughout the day may provide the incentive they need to succeed.

You might try a short delay in changing your child's soiled nappy and getting them to stand up when you change them. Both of these actions will be less comfortable for your child and can help them to grasp the unpleasantness of remaining in nappies.

Tips for successful potty training:

- Choose the potty with your child
- Give plenty of praise at every attempt to use the potty
- Consider buying one of the pottytraining books, videos or charts that are available and deal with the issue in a gentle and humorous way. Some come with stickers as rewards
- Alternatively devise your own scheme giving stickers or stars, but keep it simple
- You can offer your child other small rewards eg: a piece of fruit or a low fat snack such as a Jaffa Cake
- Always remain calm even if there is a mess. Your child will quickly pick