



# Understanding Children

## Toilet training



### ■ Ready or not?

Learning to use the toilet is a big event in a young child's life—a sure sign of growing up. Most children are eager about learning how to use the "potty" and are quite proud of their achievement.

Toilet teaching is easiest when children are physically and emotionally ready, which happens between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Girls usually gain physical control over their bowel and bladder muscles before boys do. On the average, most girls are potty-trained by age 2 1/2 and most boys around the age of 3. But don't be alarmed if your child doesn't follow this pattern closely; individual children mature physically at different rates.

The secret to success is patience and timing. Emotional readiness is also important. Many bright, normal, and healthy 3-year-olds may not be

interested in learning to use the toilet. Learning new things is a full-time job for most toddlers and toilet learning may not be as important as learning to climb, jump, run, and talk. A toddler who resists toilet training now may be ready in 3 to 6 months, then often learns almost overnight.

### ■ How do you tell if your child is ready?

#### Ask yourself the following questions:

Can my child:

- follow simple directions?
- remain dry at least 2 hours at a time during the day?
- walk to and from the bathroom, pull down pants, pull pants up?

Does my child:

- remain dry during nap time?
- seem uncomfortable with soiled or wet diapers?

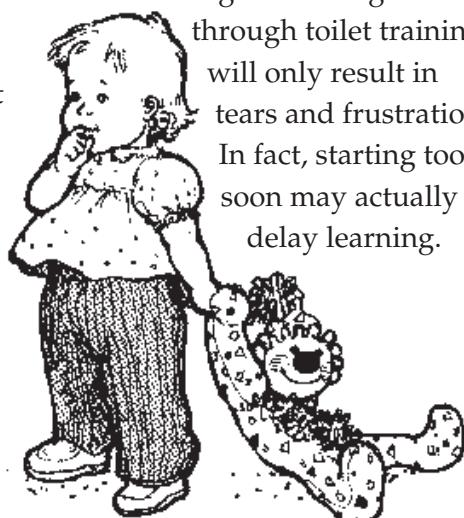
show interest in the toilet or potty chair?

Are bowel movements regular and predictable? (Some children move their bowels two to three times a day; others may go 2 to 3 days without a bowel movement.)

Has your toddler asked to wear grown-up underwear?

If you answered "yes" to most of the questions, you may want to introduce your child to toilet training. If you answered "no" to many questions, wait a while

longer. Rushing a child through toilet training will only result in tears and frustration. In fact, starting too soon may actually delay learning.



When a child is truly ready, toilet training will seem much easier.

## ■ Ten steps to toilet learning

### Step 1

**Relax!** A calm, easygoing approach to toilet training seems to work best. Remember that learning to use the toilet takes time and that each child is different. If you find that one of your children learns to use the toilet at age 2 and another learns at age 3 1/2, rest assured that you are not alone.

### Step 2

**Show children what they are to do in the bathroom.** Toddlers love to imitate adults or older children. Next time your toddler follows you into the bathroom, talk about what you do when you

use the toilet. If you are comfortable with the idea, it may be a good idea to let the child watch you use the toilet. Ideally, fathers should set an example for sons and mothers should set an example for daughters. Children also can learn about bathroom practices from older brothers, sisters, or relatives.

### Step 3

**Teach your toddler the words your family uses for body parts, urine, and bowel movements.** Make sure it's a word you feel comfortable with because others are sure to hear it. There is nothing quite like a toddler loudly announcing in the checkout lane of the grocery store that it's time to go "Poo Poo!"

### Step 4

**Help your child recognize when he or she is urinating or having a bowel movement.** Most children will grunt, squat, turn red in the face, or simply stop playing for a moment. Children need to be aware that they are urinating or having a bowel movement before they can do anything about it. For most children, bowel movements are generally easier to recognize.

### Step 5

**Borrow or purchase a potty chair or a potty attachment for the toilet.** If you purchase a potty attachment, be sure to get one with a footrest. This will allow your child to sit more comfortably

and make it easier for the child to "push" during a bowel movement. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents avoid urine deflectors because they can cut a child who is climbing on or off a potty chair. You may want to let your child practice sitting on the potty fully clothed just to get used to the idea.

### Step 6

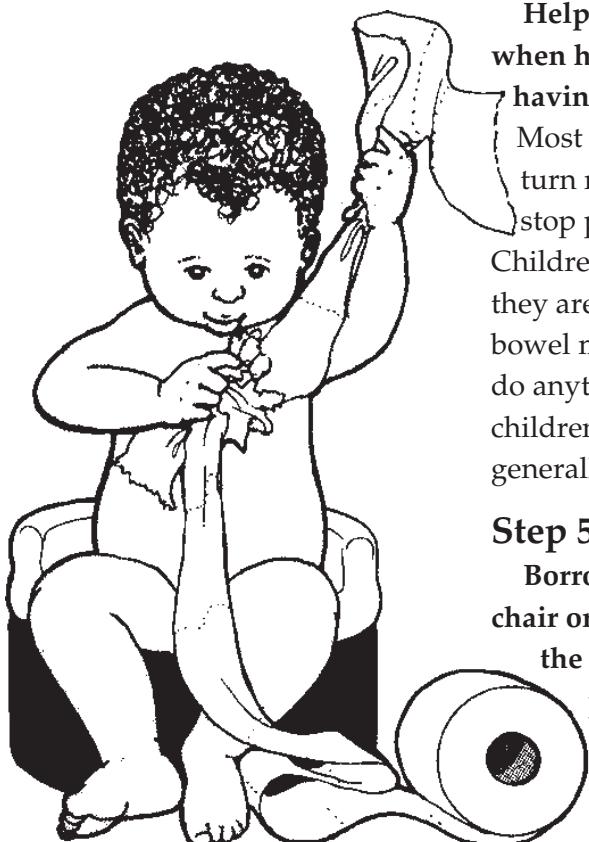
**Begin reading potty books to your child.** There are many wonderful books about learning to use the potty at your local library or bookstore. Reading a book together helps children understand the general process and that other children also learn to use the potty. Book suggestions are listed later on in this publication.

### Step 7

**Purchase training pants and easy-to-remove clothing.** Just getting to the potty on time is a major task for most children. You can help make the job easier by letting them wear pants that are easy to pull down, and by being around to assist. Avoid snaps, buttons, zippers, and belts. Some parents prefer to use diapers at first and then switch to training pants when their child is urinating in the potty several times a day.

### Step 8

**When your child tells you that he or she needs to use the potty, help with clothing and sit the child on the potty for a few minutes.** Stay with your child. It's a good idea to keep a few books



close by. Reading a book together makes the time go by easier and takes the pressure off for an immediate result.

## Step 9

**After 4 to 5 minutes, help your child off the potty.** Reward with hugs and praise if your child's efforts have been successful. Say that he or she can try again later if the child wasn't successful. Don't be surprised if your child has a bowel movement or urinates right after being taken off the toilet. This is not unusual. Accidents and near misses are generally not an act of stubbornness. It simply takes time to learn this new skill. If accidents seem to be frequent, it may be best to hold off and try toilet training a few months later.

## Step 10

**Wipe your child carefully.** Wipe girls from front to back to prevent infection. Teach your child to *always* wash hands with soap and water after using the potty.

## ■ More ideas

- If possible, plan to devote at least 3 to 4 days to begin toilet training. Maintaining the same routine for 3 to 4 weeks also helps.
- Some parents find it helpful to establish a routine by putting a child on the toilet for 3 to 4 minutes right after he or she gets up in the morning, before naps, after naps, after meals, and before bedtime. Realize however, that your child will not always use the potty.

- If you are anticipating a new baby, moving to a new home, or another major life event, you may want to wait a few months. Toilet training is easiest when both parent and child can give it their full attention.
- Remember that it's OK to keep your child in diapers or disposable training pants for sleeping. Nighttime control generally comes many months after daytime control.
- It may be helpful to use a plastic mattress cover, tablecloth, or shower curtain between the sheet and mattress until children gain nighttime control.
- Treat accidents casually. Avoid punishing, scolding, or shaming. Give your child support by keeping an upbeat, positive attitude.

## ■ Cleaning up

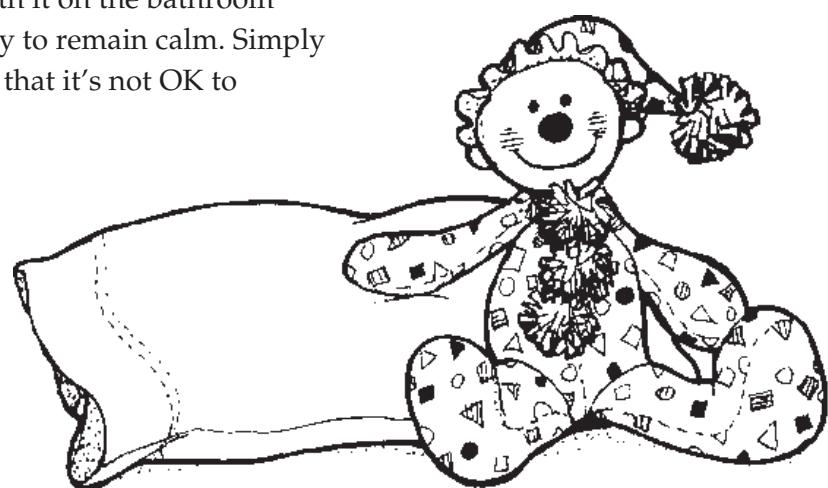
Children often are quite curious about bowel movements. If you find your child trying to remove fecal material from the toilet, or worse yet "finger painting" with it on the bathroom floor, try to remain calm. Simply explain that it's not OK to

play with feces or urine; help your child clean up the mess. Then you both can wash your hands with soap and water. It is generally a good idea to help with clean-up and flushing during much of the toilet training process.

## ■ The big flush

Children often have one of two reactions to flushing. Either they are fascinated by it (and would be willing to do it for hours) or they are quite fearful. Children who enjoy flushing will often delight in emptying the potty chair into the toilet, waving bye-bye, and watching everything "flush away."

Children who are fearful prefer that parents take charge of this process. Before flushing the toilet, make sure the child is off the potty attachment. Many children are not only fearful of the noise and swirling water, but also may think that they will be flushed down too. Reassure your child that only body wastes and toilet paper will be flushed away.



## ■ A note about bedwetting

Bedwetting is common in children under age 7. Remember that learning to control the bladder generally comes after bowel control. Many children who have mastered the toileting process during the day may not be able to stay dry at night for many months. Most children will achieve nighttime dryness by age 5, but one out of four children may continue to wet the bed for several more years.

Bedwetting appears to be related to the size of the bladder, the amount of liquid consumed before bedtime, and how soundly the child sleeps. Bedwetting also is more likely to occur when a child is ill, excited, or when a routine is upset.

For children who tend to wet the bed, it may help to wake them once during the night to use the toilet. An easy time to do this is just before parents go to bed. Persistent bedwetting, particularly after age 7, may be caused by an infection and a physician should be consulted.

## ■ Books for children

*No More Diapers*, J.G. Brooks—

A popular book with toddlers. Toilet training is illustrated through two stories. The first story is about Johnny and the second is about Susie. The text is simple and drawings are in black, white, and orange.

*Your New Potty*, Joanna Cole—

This book tells the story of two children, Ben and Steffie, who are learning to use their new potties. Illustrated by colorful photographs. Information for parents is included in the introduction. Uses adult terms for elimination.

*Once Upon a Potty*, Alona Frankel—Simple text with cartoon-like illustrations.

Available in both a boy's and girl's version as well as a book and toy package, complete with an anatomically correct doll and toy potty.

*All By Myself*, Anna Grossnickle Hines—One of the few books that talks about nighttime dryness. Josie, like most children, has successfully mastered daytime control, but at night still needs help from her mother to get to the bathroom.

In time she learns how to manage by herself.

*Going to the Potty*, Fred Rogers—

Part of the Mister Rogers Neighborhood First Experience series, this colorful book discusses toilet training. Photographs show children of all sizes, ages, and ethnic groups.

*KoKo Bear's New Potty*, Vicki Lansky—A "read together" book with cartoon bear illustrations. A useful companion to Vicki Lansky's *Practical Parenting: Toilet Training*.

## ■ Books for parents

*Parents Book of Toilet Teaching*,

Joanna Cole

*Practical Parenting: Toilet Training*,

Vicki Lansky

*Toilet Learning*, Alison Mack

## ■ Read more about it!

For more information about infants and toddlers, ask for these publications at your county extension office.

1-2-3 Grow (newsletter series for toddler years), Pm-1071a-h (cost)

*Understanding Children: Disciplining your toddler*, Pm-1529c

*A Parent's Guide to Children's Weight*, NCR-374

*Understanding Children: Fears*, Pm-1529d

*Ages and Stages*, Pm-1530