

# Teaching Your Child to Use the Potty

POTTY TRAINING IS SOMETHING YOU DO WITH YOUR CHILD. You are helping your child learn a very important skill. Teaching your child to use the toilet takes time, understanding and patience. You should not rush your child into using the toilet.

**Are YOU ready for potty training?** A few things you should think about include:

- Do you have enough time to help your child with this difficult job?
- Are you already under a lot of stress? For example, do you have a new home, job or relationship? If so, you may need to wait for a better time to begin potty training.
- Consistency during potty training is very important. Is your child's caregiver willing to help with potty training?

**Is your child showing signs that he or she is ready to learn how to use the toilet?** When your child is ready, you'll see the following signals:

- Child has bowel movements at regular times each day.
- Child's diaper stays dry for 2 hours or more.
- Child can follow simple instructions such as, "Pick up your truck and put it in the toy box."
- Child shows an interest in using the potty or asks to be changed when diaper is soiled or wet.
- Through words, facial expressions or a change in activity, your child shows you that he or she knows when a bowel movement is coming.

Most children reach this stage sometime between 18 and 36 months, but it's also normal for it to occur a little later. Early learning is possible, but not always best. It may be stressful for a child who does not have good bowel or bladder control, or the ability to take clothes off quickly to use the toilet. If your child is not ready, you can still teach him or her what a potty chair is and how it works.

When you and your child begin potty training, praise him or her for trying. Do not be upset when "accidents" happen. Punishing a child for having an "accident" will only make the child feel bad, and training will take longer.

The best way to teach your child about using the toilet is to let him or her watch other family members of the same sex (watching people of the opposite sex may be confusing). Boys usually learn to empty their bladders in the sitting position but slowly transfer to standing after watching the "older boys" do it that way.

## First Steps

Put a potty chair in your child's room or in the bathroom. (Both girls and boys may be able to use adult toilets outfitted with training seats.) Then do the following:

1. For the first few weeks, let your child sit on the potty with clothes on while you explain what the toilet is and when to use it.
2. Once your child is used to sitting on the potty, try it with the diaper off. Make the potty part of the daily routine, slowly increasing from one time to several times each day.
3. Try changing your child's diaper while he or she is seated on the potty. Dropping the contents of the dirty diaper into the potty helps your child understand what the potty is for.
4. Let your child play near the potty without a diaper and remind him or her to use the potty as needed. Children may forget or miss at first, but don't get angry. Wait until he or she goes correctly and reward and praise your child.

Like most children, your own toddler probably will take a little longer to complete nap and nighttime control. The best approach is to have your toddler use the potty right before going to bed and as soon as he or she wakes up. Using training pants instead of diapers at naptime and bedtime may help. There will be a few accidents, but a plastic sheet between the mattress and the bedding will keep the mattress dry. All children have these accidents. Praise your child whenever he or she makes it through the nap or night without wetting. Tell your child to call for you if he or she wakes up in the middle of the night and needs help to use the toilet.

