

## Toileting

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### *What Is Considered Typical?*

Nearly all children learn to use the toilet but some learn in stages and others learn all at once. Toileting happens to be one of those areas where each child will have their own schedule and will likely insist on absolute control. Successful toileting relies most on a child's readiness and willingness and on an adult's patience, support, and understanding. A child who shows no interest in toileting or who doesn't seem to recognize when they need to potty is simply not ready. On the other hand, a very young child (usually one with an older sibling) who is interested in toileting can be successful.

### *What Strategies Support Successful Toileting?*

One of the first things to do is to make sure your toilet is accessible and comfortable for a young child. Also make sure your child can remove their own clothing—tricky snaps, buckles, and even some buttons can make going potty difficult. Another important factor is patience. Some children will begin the process and then change their mind. Tempting as it may be to nudge the child to continue, taking a break and waiting for your child to show interest again usually works better.

### *What Gets in the Way of Successful Toileting?*

Even if a child shows signs of readiness, there are times when it's best to wait. Immediately after a new sibling joins the family or during a move to a new home are usually not good times to begin toileting. Some children may be very interested in toileting, but they may also have very real fears about the process. Some children are afraid they will fall in and get wet or that they will be disappear just like their "poo." These may seem like silly concerns, but responding seriously and sincerely will reassure the child. Allow your child to safely explore the toilet and show them that the pipes are too small for a person to be flushed away.

### *Are There Times to Be Concerned?*

Some children will regress in their ability to go potty by themselves during times of stress. For example, if there is a change in the family routine, a traumatic event, or a disruption in the schedule. Children sometimes regress even when changes occur that seem fairly minor. For example, when a child moves into a new bedroom or has a new preschool schedule. This is very normal.

If you do become concerned, keep track of the times and see if you can figure out what the problem might be. When a regression does occur, it's best to be patient and understanding—most children are fine as soon as their life becomes less stressful.

Occasionally, a child's ability to toilet independently may be delayed, or a child may show persistent signs of regression. If this occurs, there may be a physical ailment, and the child should be seen by their doctor. Sometimes a disruption in toileting, along with other symptoms, can indicate a problem in the child's overall environment.

### *When to Begin?*

Children begin to use the toilet when they are ready. No amount of pleading or bribing will change this.

You may have heard that "all children begin training at 18 months" or "all children must be trained by age 3." These ideas often lead to unnecessary power struggles.

### *Patience & False Alarms*

A child who is becoming aware of their body's signals may not always need to "go" when they ask for help. They may sit for several minutes then realize it was a false alarm.

Be patient and encourage your child to pay attention to their body. In the long run it will pay off.

### *Oops!*

Your child may seem like they have mastered toileting, only to have an accident. Accidents are normal, so respond with a matter-of-fact attitude.

Try to understand how and why the accident happened. Maybe your child was so busy playing that they didn't notice they had to go until it was too late.

When too much is made of an accident some children lose confidence.

