

Toilet Learning

With the support of parents and caregivers, toilet learning is a developmental process that is not only rewarding, but can build self-confidence in young children.

I let you know when I am ready by:

- showing interest in the toilet. I may want to watch others use the toilet to learn more about it.
- looking at books with pictures of children using the toilet.
- beginning to dress and undress myself.
- helping put items where they belong.
- following simple directions.
- showing bowel and bladder control for at least two hours.
- having regular bowel movements.
- using words, actions, or gestures to show that I am urinating or having a bowel movement.



Peers can be strong models and motivators for toilet learning!

When not to start toilet learning:

- when I am going through big changes, like:
 - moving to a new house;
 - changes in my family such as a divorce, a death, or a new family member;
 - moving out of a parent's bed or crib; or
 - entering a new child care arrangement.
- when I'm not interested. Don't force toilet learning, it will result in a power struggle.

Start the toilet learning process when the child is happy, healthy, and eager to help. Poor timing may cause children to become frustrated. It is best to wait a few weeks and let the process begin when the child's life is calm and consistent.

Before I'm 2 years old

My caregivers help me with toilet learning by:

- asking my family what words they use for bowel movements and urinating at home. Consistency is important!
- talking with me about my bowel movements and urination.
- allowing other children to model using the toilet. This lets me observe the process naturally.

- talking about the toilet, what it is, and what it is for.
- allowing me to participate in self-care tasks, even diapering. Let me hold the diaper or help wipe myself.
- avoiding negative labels when diapering such as “Yuck!” or “You’re stinky!”
- letting me sit on the toilet if I ask to do so.
- reading and exploring books about toilet learning with me.

When I’m ready to begin using the toilet

My caregivers help me with toilet learning by:

- being patient. It takes time and lots of accidents before I will use the toilet all by myself.
- responding to my toileting attempts matter-of-factly and without a lot of emotion.
- continuing to provide books with pictures of children using the toilet. Children’s books on toilet learning can be found at the library.
- letting me decide if I would like to wear underwear or a diaper.
- using cloth underwear during the day, when possible. This helps me feel when I’m wet.
- dressing me in loose, easy-to-remove clothing to make toileting tasks easier for me.
- providing a comfortable toileting space for me. Use child-sized toilets, toileting chairs, or child inserts. In child care centers, these toilets are required to flush.
- creating a consistent routine so I know when it is time to use the toilet.

Praise and Rewards

A child needs to be motivated to learn a new skill like toilet learning.

Offering rewards like stickers, candy, and praise during toilet learning can cause a child to only want the reward or the praise. Then, when the praise and rewards are removed, it may add needless stress and frustration for the child.

Wanting to wear underwear or use the toilet like grownups and other children can be all the motivation a child needs to learn to use the toilet.

To learn more about Toilet Learning view the Resources and References found at the end of these materials. You can also visit Zero To Three’s Learning to Use the Toilet page at <http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/early-development/all-about-potty-training.html>