



SEEDS FOR GROWTH: Potty Training

Potty training is one of the major accomplishments of early childhood. But before your child can master it, he has to be both biologically and emotionally ready. Different children are ready at different ages; the timing has nothing to do with their intelligence, personality, or motivation.

Potty training involves putting together a set of individual skills in a certain order, such as being able to interpret the signals your body is giving you, undressing, having some control over your bowels and bladder, and washing your hands. Your child should have at least some of these skills mastered before starting potty training, or you'll both become frustrated.

Here are three steps that can help your child maximize his success.

1. Preparation

- Get a potty chair. Many children feel more secure starting with one that sits on the floor rather than one that sit on top of the toilet. It's less scary, and it gives them the security and balance that comes with being able to put their feet securely on the floor.
- Put the potty chair in a place that's convenient to where your child spends most of his time. It doesn't have to be in the bathroom; you could keep it in a corner of your playroom. Ease of access is important in the beginning.
- Let your child explore the potty chair and become familiar with it. Let him know that it's special and it's just for him.

2. Learning

- Have your child practice sitting on the potty with her clothes on once or twice a day. Let her get up whenever she wants. Your goal is to help her become comfortable with it.
- Praise your child for each step, even the small ones and the ones that aren't completely successful. Stay upbeat. Remember that this is *her* accomplishment, not yours.
- Once she's comfortable sitting on the potty with her clothes on, have her practice sitting on it with her clothes off. This helps her get familiar with the concept of removing her clothes before going to the bathroom. It also lets her feel what the seat is like next to her skin.
- After a few days, when your child has a bowel movement in her diaper, have her watch you dump it into the potty so that she can see where it should go. Explain to her that this is where urine and stool belong. (Children this age are also mastering the idea that certain things go in certain places.)
- Look for signs that your child needs to urinate or move her bowels. Some children will tell you in so many words. Others will grimace or grunt or get into a particular position. When that happens, ask her if she needs to go.
- Let your child see you sitting on the toilet. Let her sit on her potty chair at the same time, if it's in the bathroom. It's easier for boys if they first learn to urinate while sitting down. If they begin by standing up, sometimes they'll resist sitting down to have a bowel movement; it's too confusing.
- Have her practice washing her hands with soap and water every time she gets off the potty, even if she doesn't do anything.

- Keep your child in easy to remove clothing, such as pants that she can simply pull down without having to unbutton anything, or a dress or skirt. That increases the likelihood of success. Alternatively, begin by letting her run around the house for a few days without any pants on. Offer to remind her every hour to try using the potty. This will help her learn to interpret the signals her body is giving to her.
- Share what you're doing and how you're doing it with the other caregivers in your child's life, such as babysitters and grandparents. That way your child will have consistent expectations and support, which will make things easier.
- Never leave your child in wet or soiled diapers as a way of "training" her. That only makes matters worse.

3. Reinforcement

- Give your child lots of praise at each stage of learning. It's also a good idea to praise him whenever he tells you he has to use the potty, even if you've just asked him the question.
- Expect him to make mistakes, especially in the beginning. Don't get angry; that will just make things take longer. If he resists trying something new, it probably means he's not ready yet. Simply back off and try again in a few days or even weeks.
- Once your child has been successful for a few days, start making the switch to underwear. Some children feel more secure in diapers or training pants; others can't wait for "big boy" or "big girl" underwear. Let your child's reaction guide you in how quickly you make the change.
- Remember that some young children are frightened by the sound and actions of a flushing toilet. If he's bothered by it, don't force him to flush; do it after he leaves the room. That fear usually goes away in a few months.

Be consistent with preparation, learning and reinforcement, and you will be surprised how soon you will get rid of those diapers for good!

When you know they are ready

1. Child takes pride in accomplishments and likes some independence

This shows emotionally, they would be prepared for something like potty training. Griffin started playing for longer periods independently and didn't mind sitting down for a poopy by himself for 10-15 minutes. If your child isn't showing these sign posts, try to think of little tasks that they can do for themselves like feeding the family fish or dog, or dropping a letter in the mailbox, and see if they like the feeling of accomplishment. Gently encourage appropriate independence.

2. Child will occasionally have "dry periods"

I remember Griffin would sometimes wake up from nap with a dry diaper. This shows us that they have some form of bladder control and that their anatomy is able to hold urine, making it physically possible to potty train.

3. Child doesn't like wearing dirty diapers

At some point, children won't like the feeling of wet diapers or big poops in their pants. Cuz let's face it, they output is getting rather large, no matter how absorbent your diaper is. Griffin didn't seem to mind too much but once we potty trained, he hated if he had an accident. Didn't like that feeling at all, which helps the whole process.

4. Child notices others going potty

Griffin started noticing when his daddy or I would go potty. He'd even come into the bathroom and comment on it. Sometimes, he'd want to see it or flush the toilet afterwards. Encourage these kind of interactions! You're teaching your boy or girl how the process works.

Griffin would also notice when my parent's dog Hershey would go potty. He loved watching this. He'd then imitate by lifting his leg or squatting on the grass. He also thought it was silly when we'd pick up Hershey's poop and he'd call it "stinky" and giggle. Again, these are all great things for child to see. If you don't have pets, maybe go to zoo or watch a video that shows this natural process.

5. Child says they're going potty

Randomly, Griffin started saying "I'm going pee pee" as he stood still and smiled. Or he'd say "I just peed!" These were cues to me that he was understanding howp his body functioned and when he was actually going.

6. It becomes obvious when they go #2

Griffin's whole demeanor would change if he had to go number 2. He'd stand alone and make grunting noises. It was so obvious to everyone is was almost comical. His bowels were becoming big enough that it was a minor event.

Griffin started isolating himself when he went number 2. He wanted privacy and to be alone. Sometimes, he would actually go into the bathroom and shut the door and poo in his diaper. This is a big red flag and a sign that child is ready to start potty training.

7. Child will try out potty

If your child is willing to sit on the potty, that's a great sign! Encourage it. Whereas if your boy or girl show big resistance to the idea, I would wait a month or two and try again.