

# Potty Training Two- and Three-Year- Olds

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## Facts:

- Your child cannot be convinced, coerced, nagged, or bribed to use the toilet.
- Children learn to use the toilet independently when they are interested and motivated to do so. It has nothing to do with intelligence or laziness.
- On average, children are successfully day-trained between 2 ½ and 4 years old, and night-trained anywhere from 3 to 8 years old.
- Once the training process has begun, becoming fully toilet-trained can take some time (3-4 weeks to several months).

## Signs that your child may be ready to begin training:

- He can tell you when he is wet/soiled, or when he wants to go potty.
- She can wait (“hold it”), or she can control the urge to go to the bathroom.
- He shows an interest in the toilet, or he shows a desire to stay dry.
- She can pull down her own pants.

## Preparing to undertake toilet training:

- **Observe your child.**
  - Once he shows a predictable pattern, sit him on the toilet at times when his bladder tends to be full. This activity helps him to associate the “full bladder” feeling with the toilet.
- **You can use either a training potty or your regular toilet.**
  - If you use your toilet, use a seat ring so that your child will not be afraid of falling in. Also, provide a step stool or other support for her feet.
- **Help your child prepare:**
  - Use diapers only during naps and overnight. (Diapers indicate that it is alright to wet or pass a bowel movement.)
  - Let your child wear loose clothing that is easy to remove during the training period.
  - Talk about the potty/toilet and what it is used for. Let your child play with it and become familiar.

- Let your child watch you use the toilet. You are modeling appropriate toilet behavior for your child (including washing your hands afterward!).

## Teaching your child:

- **Choose a day to begin.**
  - A weekend is best, when everyone is home and relaxed. That will enable you to consistently follow the training routine.
- **Explain the steps involved. For example:**
  - Tell Mommy or Daddy that you need to go potty.
  - Walk to the bathroom.
  - Pull down your pants.
  - Sit on the toilet seat.
  - Try to do a wee-wee or a poopie (use whatever words are meaningful for your child).
  - Wipe yourself, or ask for help with wiping.
  - Flush the toilet.
  - Wash your hands.
- **Offer your child plenty to drink.**
  - When you begin training, you may wish to provide extra drinks in order to give your child more opportunities to practice. However, do not force him to drink more than he wants. Help keep bowel movements soft by providing sufficient fruit and fiber in his diet.
- **Ask your child if she needs to “go.”**
  - If your child does not tell you that she needs to go to the bathroom, ask her from time to time. Signs to watch for include holding herself and straining (clenched facial expression). Remind your child of the steps to follow to use the bathroom.
- **Encourage your child to sit on the toilet.**
  - When you think he needs to go, sit him on the toilet for 3-5 minutes. Do this when you see signs that indicate the need to potty, upon waking in the morning, after meals, before going out, upon returning home, and just before going to bed.
  - Do not force your child to sit on the toilet. If she does not want to sit on the toilet, do not make her.
  - If she sits regularly on the toilet and is relaxed, she will eventually have success. Praise her! Allow time for her to admire what she has done and enjoy your attention, and then remind her to flush the toilet and wash her hands. Wait at least 2 hours before taking her to the bathroom again, unless she asks to go sooner.
  - If he sits on the toilet but does not do anything, praise him for sitting on the toilet. Let him go back to playing and try again later.
- **Don't forget the importance of washing hands!**
  - Emphasize how important it is that she wash her hands after going potty, and praise her for cooperating.
- **Encourage desirable behavior.**
  - Praise your child for any steps that he follows, any progress that he makes, and for successfully going potty in the toilet. Tell your child when he has done well: “Jack, that was such a nice job of telling me that you need to go potty.” You may choose to use rewards for success (e.g., a phone call to Grandma, stickers, a star on a chart).



### A Tip for Training Boys:

You might consider teaching your son to urinate while sitting first. It can be very exciting to urinate while standing, and after he learns to do so it might be difficult to get him to sit on the toilet at all! Once he has tackled sitting, his father, older brother, or other trusted caregiver can demonstrate how to appropriately urinate while standing.



### A Tip for Training Girls:

Be sure you teach your daughter to wipe from front to back after she has a bowel movement. This method of wiping helps prevent infection.

### Additional Tips:

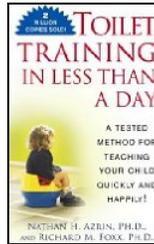
- You WILL have setbacks! Remember that toilet training is a process. Sometimes a child will wet her pants right after toileting, which can be frustrating for you. Just remember that this is an indicator that you are catching her at the right time for training!
- Make sure your child can easily reach the toilet or potty.
- Ask your child if he needs to use the toilet before and after long play periods or outings. Likewise, encourage your child to use the toilet before bed.
- If your child appears distressed at the experience of flushing or at seeing her toileting efforts “disappear” down the drain, turn it into a fun game and wave “bye-bye,” for example.
- Continue to use diapers at night until your child stays dry until morning.
- Be aware that children sometimes have setbacks during stressful times or illness (e.g., a new baby, a new school, absence from a caregiver).
- As your child masters using the toilet, gradually wait until she has completed more and more steps before giving praise. When she becomes a pro, you can gradually stop giving rewards. However, you should continue to praise your child from time to time for completing the steps and for staying dry.
- You can use a doll to model toileting behavior, and to give your child the opportunity to “teach” the doll how to use the toilet. (Teaching is the best way to learn, after all!) Azrin and Foxx, in their book *Toilet Training in Less Than a Day*, discuss in detail a method for using a doll in the teaching process.
- Consider using a book to help your child grasp the concept. Experts recommend *Bye, Bye Diapers* by Ellen Weiss (Golden Books, 1998) and *I Have to Go* by Sesame Street (Random House, 1990).
- Hang in there! Your child WILL learn to use the toilet when he is ready to do so. If training gets too stressful for you and/or your child, take a break for a few weeks and then try again.

### Sources

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## Additional Toilet Training Resources

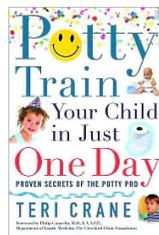
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Azrin, N.H., & Foxx, R.M. (1989). *Toilet training in less than a day: A tested method for teaching your child quickly and happily*. Pocket Books/Simon & Schuster.



American Academy of Pediatrics. (2003). *The American Academy of Pediatrics guide to toilet training*. Bantam Books.



Crane, T. (2006). *Potty train your child in less than one day: Proven secrets of the potty pro*. Simon & Schuster.

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Pampers and Huggies both have useful information and resources that you can access online, including coupons, free samples, charts, and tips:

- [www.pull-ups.com](http://www.pull-ups.com)
- [www.pampers.com/easy-ups](http://www.pampers.com/easy-ups)

To print out a variety of free behavior charts (including potty training), check out this website:

- [www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com](http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com)