POTTY TRAINING 101

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There is no standard age for children to become toilet trained, though most kids are relatively trained between 18 months and 3 years. Girls tend to be trained a bit earlier than boys, though many boys are trained before 2 years as well.

What are the physical signs of toilet training readiness?

- Has dry periods for at least 1-2 hours and may have a dry diaper during the day and night
- Has regular, soft poos at relatively predictable times
- Can physically pull up and down a training diaper or underwear

What are the behavioural signs of readiness?

- Shows an interest in toilet training
- Not fearful of the toilet/potty
- Self-motivated to train
- Shows signs of discomfort when diaper is wet or dirty
- Desire for independence ('I do it', 'My turn')
- Asks for help with ease

What are the cognitive signs of readiness?

- Has words for pee and poo
- Can understand and follow simple instructions
- Shows awareness that he/she is peeing or pooing – this seems simple but many kids don't even notice when they are!

If you think your child may be ready, you want to set your child up for success.
This should be a POSITIVE, non-stressful experience.
You want your child to WANT to train, be MOTIVATED to train and have a REWARDING EXPERIENCE.

Equipment

Some kids like to pee/poo like us on the toilet. Some kids are terrified of having their feet off the ground, and prefer to sit on a potty. I suggest trying the toilet with a comfortable toddler seat (ideally one with a splash guard in front if you have boys). If your child is scared, try a potty. Most boys are toilet trained over a year before they can pee standing up (versus sitting down).At first I offer children to sit on the potty/toilet with a diaper on to try it out. They should see it isn't scary. Many kids are initially hesitant as they see/feel a big hole and don't want to fall in. You want them to feel safe and secure as fear can lead to delay of training for weeks to months!

Underwear shopping

Many kids are motivated by getting new underwear. Involve your child in the process. My kids picked out their favorite character underwear and were so eager to wear them. One more incentive!

Use real words

Help your child to understand what the toilet is for. It is for peeing and pooing. They pee from their vagina or penis. They poo from their bum (or whatever words you want to use). If they understand where the pee comes from it is easier for them to visualize how to do it. My sons would look down and say, 'the pee is coming from my penis'. And when they see it, ongoing success is more likely as they can replicate this again.

'Routine based training'
This is the term I use for my training method. I admit I don't love the boot-camp style of training such as the 3-day method. I find these stressful for kids and have seem many children refuse to train again for months when put in a high stress situation when they must train. Instead I rely on routine. After breakfast, lunch and dinner, and before bath/bedtime, I take my kids to the washroom to try. Eating and drinking is a strong stimulus to pee and poo. We often ignore these urges, as we are busy, but kids (like dogs!) can be trained this way. My kids move from the meal table to the washroom and pee or poo.

The benefit of routine based training as it can avoid the fighting that may ensue when you are constantly reminding your kids to use the washroom. If it is routine, there is less battling. The predictability is great for you to! My kids are all 'trained' to poo after meal times, and pretty much never poo outside these windows. Easy for school and playdates!

When your child is in the early stages of training you can certainly offer a potty break more frequently, but only so much that they are still happy to try and not getting stressed out about it. You want them to be happy and eager to try, not feel like it is a chore and annoy them.

Reward, reward
Kids, much like animals, respond well to praise and positive reinforcement. Find something your child really loves. High fives, singing a favorite song, stickers or treats are good ones. When we trained my kids, they got a sticker for trying, and an M&M for success. Use motivators that your child doesn't get regularly, or else it isn't as strong a motivator. Your child will then learn to connect the dots – when they pee or poo they get the best treat of all. Remember to tell everyone who is helping to train your child (caregiver, daycare provider, nanny, grandparents etc.) what rewards to use.

Don't dilly daly
I commonly hear of parents that offer screens to kids when they are sitting on the potty. I don't suggest this. A child will learn that they can watch as long as it takes to pee or poo. This can be quite a while. Sitting on the toilet for too long puts added pressure on the rectum, which can lead to hemorrhoids, anal fissures and skin tags. Not comfortable. So, I limit potty time to 10 min or less. Your child is not likely to go after 5 min anyway.

Cleaning up
Early on, your child will likely not be able to really wipe him or herself. You can show how, but the job will likely be yours. Show your daughter to wipe back to front. Wipes are usually easier than toilet paper (the softer, the better the experience for your child as well). Show your child how to wash their hands, ideally by using soap for as long as it takes to sing Happy Birthday.

Ditch the diapers
If your child is very motivated and can stay dry for an hour at a time, you can consider going right into underwear during early training. If your child isn't quite there yet, and you are having lots of accidents, I still offer frequent bathroom breaks, with diapers or training pants still worn, until they are more consistently dry.

Night training
Staying dry at night is a totally different story! Most kids are day trained for months, or even years before they can hold it all night, especially if they are deep sleepers. When the training diaper or diaper is dry each night for 2 weeks, you can try without.

Some tips
- Know when to call it quits–some kids are just not ready. If there is lots of resistance, try again in a few months
- Accidents happen – be prepared with extra underwear and pants
- Stay calm and reassuring, don't get angry
- Chat with your doctor if training isn't going as planned, or if you suspect issues such as urinary tract infections or constipation are getting in your way of success.