

# My Toilet Learning



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**Just like learning to walk, I will learn to use the toilet or potty when I am ready. Toilet learning can take time because I need to set the pace. You can support and guide me by knowing the signs that show that I am ready and helping me learn the skills I need. I am unique. I will learn at my own speed.**

**I may be ready to start learning when I am between two and four years old. Be patient with me because it may take three to six months before I am not wearing diapers anymore. When I say “potty”, I mean using either a toilet with a potty seat or a potty.**







## To decide if I am ready, think about...

Am I able to learn physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally?

### Physically:

- Can I walk to the potty? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Can I sit on the potty without falling over? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Is my diaper dry for one to two hours in a row? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Can I pull my pants up and down? Yes ☐ No ☐



Am I Ready?

### Intellectually:

- Am I interested in the potty (i.e. do I watch you on the toilet or do I like books about the potty)? Yes ☐ No ☐  
.....
- Can I follow one or two simple instructions? Yes ☐ No ☐  
.....
- Can I tell you when I need to use the potty? Yes ☐ No ☐  
.....
- Do I understand all the steps involved in learning to use the potty? Yes ☐ No ☐

### **Socially:**

- Am I willing to stop playing to go to use the potty? Yes ☐ No ☐

### **Emotionally:**

- Do I want to do things by myself? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 
- Do I want to please you? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 
- Am I calm or just a little upset when I have an accident? Yes ☐ No ☐

- 
- Am I willing and able to tell you that I had an accident, and to help clean up? Yes ☐ No ☐

I may be ready if you say “yes” to most of these questions. If you answer “no” to some, I may need help in these areas before I’ll be ready to use the potty.







## What else is happening in our home?

- Did we move recently? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Do we have a new baby? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Did we have some other big change in our family? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered “yes” to some of these questions, now may not be the right time for me to learn to use the potty. Big changes that happen in our home can be hard for me to adjust to.

If I go backwards a bit in my toilet learning with a new baby in our house, it may be that I am not ready to give up being the baby in the family. Or, I may be excited to be the big brother/sister and want to do all the big kid things like using the potty to show that I am not a baby anymore.

If I am showing you that I want to learn, encourage me. If I am not sure, this may not be a good time for me to learn.



## What is my personality?

- Is it easy for me to sit still? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Do I notice when my diaper is wet or poopy? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Can you guess when I will go poop, around the same time every day? Yes ☐ No ☐
- Is it easy for me to stop what I am doing to go to the bathroom? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answer “no” to some of these questions, I may have a bit more trouble with toilet learning. I just need more help from you to learn that part.

## How does my development affect my learning?

Am I having a hard time doing things (i.e. getting dressed, getting in/out of the car, eating meals)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answer “no”, I may be going through an easy time when I am patient and eager to please. We will have an easier time with toilet learning.

# How to help me learn to use the potty

## Preparing me to start

Let's start when we have enough time for you to help me every day. It may take me a few months, so keep watching for signs that I am ready to move from one step to the next.

- Dress me in clothes that I can pull up and down easily (no buttons or snaps, please!). I may not even need to wear pants if we are at home.
- Teach me the words to use for body parts, peeing and pooping. I need to use words that are not confusing or embarrassing.
- Show me the potty and what it is for. My poop diapers can be put in the potty to help me understand what to do in the bathroom. Let me see how you or my older siblings use the toilet. Pretend to have a doll or one of my stuffed animals use the potty.



Let's read books together about using the potty. Tell me how everyone who is a big person uses it. Let me sit on the potty when I want.

- Encourage me to sit on the potty when I am fully dressed, then let me try sitting on it for a couple of minutes without wearing my diaper.
- Make sure that my feet are touching the floor with the potty or a footstool when I am using the toilet. A toilet seat adapter would be helpful too if I am using the toilet. They make me feel more steady and secure. If I can't relax, I can't pee or poop.

Help me recognize when I am peeing or pooping by telling me when it is happening. We can talk about how uncomfortable my diaper is and how comfortable it feels to be dry and clean.

- Always go with me to the bathroom and make sure that all the things I should not touch are locked up or put away (i.e. cleaners and medications).

## Helping me to practice

Let's have a routine of me sitting on the potty at certain times of day like after waking in the morning, after eating a meal or snacks, before naptime, and before bedtime.

- Watch me for signs that I might need to use the potty. Encourage me to tell you when I have to go. Praise me for telling you, even if it is after I've already gone pee or poop.
- Stay with me while I sit on the potty for five to ten minutes. I need to be relaxed to pee or poop, so I could read a book or play with a toy. Suggest that we try later if nothing happens.





Praise me for my efforts and successes.  
Reassure me about my misses.

Show me how to wipe properly (i.e. girls should wipe from front to back). I may need you to wipe for me, especially after I poop.  
Teach me how to wash my hands after using the potty.

Maybe after I have been successful for at least a week, you could suggest getting me cotton underwear.  
Let's make this a special moment!

## Night time toilet learning

- I may be clean and dry all day, but it may take more months or years for me to stay dry during naps or all night.
- I can still wear a diaper at night, but encourage me to use the potty.
- Let me know that it is ok to wake you for help.
- A plastic sheet under my bed sheet will help protect my mattress.
- After I am dry for several nights, I can try wearing cotton underwear or training pants.

## What if toilet learning isn't working?

- Be flexible with my learning. If I am resisting or not interested in using the potty after a few weeks, let me try again in one to three months when I may be more ready.
- If I don't want to poop in the potty, it is ok for me to do it in my diaper so I don't get constipated. If I get constipated and have painful poops, it will take longer for me to learn to use the potty.
- It is ok for me to go back to using diapers during times of stress. Watch me for signs that I am ready to try again.





## Points to Remember

I will need to practice my new skills before I am successful


Praise me often for my actions, like “It’s great that you went pee in your potty chair!” Be patient and cheerful. I don’t need to be rewarded with candies or other foods. If a reward is used, we could try stars on a chart, a coin in the piggy bank, or a song of success.

Please don’t get angry, punish, embarrass or blame me when accidents happen. Learning to control my bladder and bowels takes time. I will make mistakes as I learn. Be gentle with me as I may already be upset and need your support.  
Have a change of clothes available for me.

- It may be easier to start learning in the spring or summer when there are less clothes for me to remove.
- Try not to use negative words like “dirty” or “stinky” because I may feel self-conscious.

Tell other people who care for me about my toilet learning so that everyone is doing the same thing with me.

- Boys can learn peeing sitting down first then to stand up later.
- If we are using a potty chair, we could have one available on every floor of our home for me to get to them easier. I could even claim the potty as my own and decorate it with my favourite things (i.e. stickers, glitter glue).



## Consult with your child's primary health care provider if your child:

- Still refuses after several tries
- Is older than four years old
- Has hard painful stools, has blood in the stool, or is withholding stools
- Was using the potty/toilet for a good length of time (months) and now has regressed
- Has developed redness or rash around the vagina, foul smelling or cloudy urine, or suddenly needs to go more frequently or urgently

For more information about your child's toilet learning, call Durham Health Connection Line to speak to a Public Health Nurse or visit [www.durham.ca](http://www.durham.ca)



**HEALTH  
DEPARTMENT**

**Durham Health Connection Line**  
**905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729**  
**[durham.ca/ChildDevelopment](https://durham.ca/ChildDevelopment)**

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

June 2022

