

iBlankie

every parent's security blanket



TOILET TRAINING 101

CONTENTS

<i>WHAT ARE THE TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF TOILET TRAINING?</i>	3
<i>AT WHAT AGE SHOULD TOILET TRAINING START?</i>	3
<i>WHAT IS A GOOD BASIC TOILET TRAINING PLAN?</i>	4
Self-concept	4
WHAT A BIG KID!	
HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL STRONG AND POWERFUL	
READ BOOKS	
USE PLAY	
PLANT THE SEED WITH ACCESSORIES!	
Behavior	6
SWITCH UP THE DIAPER ROUTINE	
BABY STEPS TOWARD USING THE TOILET	
PLAY CAN HELP	
ACCIDENTS HAPPEN	
<i>HOW CAN I STEP UP THE BASIC TOILET TRAINING PLAN?</i>	7
DITCHING DIAPERS	
TIP YOUR CHILD'S AMBIVALENCE	
<i>FAQ</i>	8

WHAT ARE THE TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF TOILET TRAINING?

Toilet training is a two-pronged process involving both encouraging your child's self-concept as a big boy/big girl and shaping your child's toileting behavior.

Sometimes power struggles develop over toilet training. But you can't force your child to use the toilet, so power struggles are counterproductive. Toileting issues should not be considered discipline issues, but opportunities for children to feel positive about their bodies and the process of maturing. Parents should be partners in encouraging their children to feel like big boys and girls who want to use the toilet.

- Toilet training should come from an internal place within your child where they think of themselves as a big boy or a big girl and want to give up their diapers and use the toilet. Toilet training is an opportunity for your child to become more independent and to achieve the developmental milestone of feeling like a big kid.
- Toilet learning can be facilitated by encouraging positive behavior regarding bathrooms, toilets, and toileting experiences.

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD TOILET TRAINING START?

The age for starting toilet-training in children varies greatly by culture. Some cultures encourage toilet training at one year old, some two years, some three.

Toilet training can only be achieved when your child has the bladder and bowel muscles to control their bodily functions. Toilet training should be encouraged when your child is ready to leave toddlerhood and begin to conceptualize themselves as a big boy, big girl, or big kid. When adults impose an arbitrary age at which to begin toilet training, a child's body and a child's self-concept may not be ready to move on to a more mature place and the experience can be frustrating and self-defeating for you and your child.

In my experience, when children are encouraged to become toilet-trained before age three they sometimes regress when they become three or four and revert back to diapers. In addition, some young children that are toilet-trained at a very young age can become somewhat obsessive about needing to put-things-in-their-proper-place rather than have a more relaxed attitude toward life.

Most girls become interested in learning to use the toilet at ages 3 to 3-1/2 and most boys become interested in learning to use the toilet at ages 3-1/2 to 4. For many first-born children this may occur later as they don't have an older sibling present to imitate this toileting behavior in their home.

Note: You can use the suggestions in the basic toilet training plan to plant the seeds to begin laying the foundation for toilet training for a child younger than 3.

Note: When a daycare center or preschool requires that your child be toilet-trained by age 3, this is often for classroom management purposes and is not developmentally appropriate. Check with your local Health Licensing Requirements for Childcare Programs to see what requirements are government-mandated and what requirements are group care preferences.

WHAT IS A GOOD BASIC TOILET TRAINING PLAN?

The following are important parts of a good basic toilet training plan.

Self-concept

The following suggestions help your child's self-concept in terms of their thinking of themselves as a bigger, more capable child. Helping your child feel like a big kid helps the toilet training process. Your young child knows that big kids don't wear diapers. Therefore, when your child conceptualizes themselves as a big kid, they won't want to wear diapers.

WHAT A BIG KID!

At every opportunity, address how your child is a big boy or big girl. (Note: Although calling your child "Baby" can be a sweet term of endearment, please try to refrain from this, as you want your child to view themselves, even in subtle ways, as maturing, not staying little.)

HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL STRONG AND POWERFUL

This can help them be more comfortable with the concept of being a "big kid." Take many opportunities every day to remind them how strong and powerful they are: your child has strong arms to carry grocery bags, strong hands that open peanut butter jars, powerful legs that help them run like the wind, and a strong mind with powerful thoughts. The underlying message is that they are strong and capable and can take care of themselves—it is safe for them to grow up because they can handle many challenges.

READ BOOKS

Books can help a child work through some of their concerns and anxieties about toileting and can help normalize the toileting process. Some favorites:

- “Everyone Poops” by Taro Gomi and Amanda Mayer Stinchecum
- “Where’s the Poop?” by Julie Markes
- “Once Upon a Potty” by Alona Frankel

USE PLAY

Play can address some of the anxieties your child may have and can normalize the toilet training process. Have a toilet for your child’s dollhouse; buy a small dollhouse-sized toilet for your child’s superhero. Talk about your child’s dinosaurs and dolls pooping. Make paper or cloth diapers for their stuffed animals.

Play with the Play-doh Fun Factory can also help; identify your child’s process as they put the playdough into the top of the Fun Factory and push the lever to squeeze out the huge snake-like playdough creation that comes out the side hole; comments such as “Great squeezing” and “You have made a wonderful playdough creation” can be very encouraging. (Direct comparisons to bowel movements need not be made; the play is metaphorical.)

Follow your child’s lead in all of this play. If they need to make jokes or laugh, that’s fine—they are working through their discomfort. If your child doesn’t respond to this play, then put it aside for another time or drop it altogether.

PLANT THE SEED WITH ACCESSORIES!

Buy some fun underwear! This plants the seed for the concept of your child switching from diapers to underwear. Superheroes, Hello Kitty, animals, dinosaur, and days-of-the-week underwear are always interesting to young children. “I bought this _____ underwear for you for when you are ready to use the toilet. I’ll put it in your drawer to have it for that time.”

Also get a child-size toilet. Be low-key. “This is for you to use when you are ready.” And just leave it in the bathroom.

Behavior

The following activities help shape your child's behavior so that they give up diapers and begin using the toilet.

SWITCH UP THE DIAPER ROUTINE

Start changing your child's diaper when they are standing up. Changing your child when they are lying down can be infantilizing. Of course do this at floor level!

Whenever possible, change your child's diaper in the bathroom, preferably standing up, but lying down if they insist on that. If your child is not interested in being in the bathroom for a diaper change, try playing their favorite music in the bathroom or sing a silly toileting song (just using the word poop can often elicit giggles, so a silly Poop Song should do the trick!) It also helps if you keep a supply of diapers in the bathroom.

Comment in a low-key manner on how appropriate the bathroom is for changing their diaper. "The bathroom is where poop and pee belong." "Changing your diaper is so easy when we do it in the bathroom."

Try using a room spray deodorizer. Most young children are very sensitive to the noxious odors of bowel movements. You want to make toileting a positive experience on a sensory level. Your child may really like spraying the can themselves.

BABY STEPS TOWARD USING THE TOILET

After you have changed your child, if they have poop in their diaper, ask them if they want to shake it into the toilet. If not, that's okay. You are planting the seed of putting poop where it eventually belongs. Then, give your child the option of pulling the toilet handle and flushing. You can even do this if there is just pee in the diaper. Most children enjoy the noise and power they can get from flushing the toilet. (If your child is fearful, don't push this, of course.) This is a way of engaging your child in the toilet training process, even if it is having them learn the last step first!

Note: Some children are afraid of the toilet water and the water swirling down the toilet. If this is the case, then keep the toilet lid closed when your child pulls the toilet handle.

PLAY CAN HELP

Many a young boy has become toilet trained when his parent has put Cheerios in the toilet and challenged him to pee on the Cheerios. Many a young girl has become toilet trained when she has put her doll on the little potty next to her and she sits on the regular toilet and they have conversations together.

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Be low-key about accidents when your child is wearing underwear. Be accepting and offer hope for future toileting control. "You peed in your underwear. That's okay. I know that you are trying hard and that sometime soon you will be able to control your bladder and pee in the toilet. Your choice: do you want to put on a diaper or underpants now?"

Avoid having your child sit on the toilet at a specific time for a certain length of time. These are power struggles that are counterproductive and for which there is no winner.

HOW CAN I STEP UP THE BASIC TOILET TRAINING PLAN?

If your daughter is approaching 3-1/2 or your son is approaching 4, you might want to step up the intensity of partnering with your child around toileting.

DITCHING DIAPERS

Encourage your child to wear underwear for short periods of time. At the end of this short period, give your child total choice over whether they want to continue to wearing underpants or if they want to change to a diaper. This can be at home on the weekends for two to three hours, for a short errand outside the house, or for a half-day of preschool/daycare.

You can have diapers for your child to put on when they come in the door from school/daycare so that they have an immediate choice. If your child is in full daycare you can talk with the staff about offering your child a diaper mid-morning or at lunch if they have worn underwear in the morning. Giving your child choices around diapers versus underwear is empowering and encourages independence. Giving choices can also deflect power struggles.

TIP YOUR CHILD'S AMBIVALENCE

Sometimes encouragers, also known as bribes and rewards, can be helpful. Many young children are ambivalent about making the switch to the toilet and sometimes encouragers can be just what the child needs to become toilet trained, although encouragers should be used in moderation. If you have tried most of the previous suggestions and you are fairly certain that your child has physical bladder and bowel control, you can add a sticker system, star chart, or a special toy to up the ante.

When my young daughter was in the process of learning to use the toilet she was extremely nervous. The week of her 4th birthday I initiated the following conversation: "You are going to be four this week. You know it's time to start using the toilet. What day do you want to give up your diapers?" She said, "On my birthday." Then, three days later on her birthday she got up in the morning and went to the bathroom and made a bowel movement in the toilet. I gave her lots of encouragement for using the toilet and being a big girl. She smiled and then looked worried. She said, "Now that I am such a big girl does that mean that I have to drive the car and take it onto Beltway traffic?" I never could have imagined what her anxiety about toileting involved. It was an amazing lesson in how young children think!

When my son was about to turn 4 we had a conversation about giving up his diapers. He said that he didn't want to grow up yet. At the time he was totally into ThunderCats and was begging for ThunderCat Mountain, the huge plastic headquarters for the ThunderCats. Desperate, I told him that big boys get ThunderCat Mountain. He asked what he needed to do to be a big boy. I told him that he had to give up his diapers. He gave up his diapers that day, we went to the toy store and bought ThunderCat Mountain and he never looked back. This is the real world—when all else fails, I believe in encouragers.

FAQ

Q. What vocabulary should I use when talking about toilet training with my child?

Many parents use words such as pee or pee-pee for urine and poop or doo-doo for bowel movements. If this feels more comfortable to you, then use that vocabulary, but also mix in the more formal words such as urine or urinate and bowel movement so that your child learns these words also. Be sure to include talk about your child's bladder ("Does your bladder feel full?"), your child's bowels, your child's penis and/or urethra, and your child's rectum or anus when discussing toilet training and body parts.

Q. My child has urinated in the toilet for some time, but he won't use the toilet for bowel movements. What should I do?

Some children have bowel control later than bladder control. Dealing with bowel movements can be more complicated for young children who find bowel movements smelly, messy, and an unbelievable creation that comes out of their body. Reading books about poop can help normalize this process for your child.

Q. My child has been toilet-trained for six months and is now wanting to go back to diapers. What should I do?

This is not unusual, especially if your child was toilet-trained at an earlier age. Give your child choices as described above. Go with the regressive younger behavior. Know that your child was toilet-trained at some point in time and can get back to that toilet-trained place.

Q. My child wears underwear and then asks for a diaper when she has to urinate or make a bowel movement. What should I do?

Recognize that your child does have bladder and bowel control, she is just not putting her urine and bowel movements into the toilet. Most of her hard work is done. Use the above suggestions to transition to her using the toilet.

Copyright 2023 Blue Wildfire, LLC