

Surviving Toilet Training

Most children are ready for toilet training sometime between their second and third birthdays. This is the same time that they are experiencing what many parents call “the terrible two’s”—a time when the children are having their first experiences with the word “No!” and with exerting their own will and making their own opinions known. As wonderful and funny as two-year-olds can be, their willfulness and independence can make toilet training a real trial for their parents.

What can parents do to survive toilet training? The first thing is to realize that everyone becomes toilet trained eventually! Your child will, too. The second thing to remember is that toilet training does not occur at the same time for every child. Your child will be ready when he or she is developmentally ready, and this may be different than the child next door or your child’s brother or sister. If you try to pressure your child into toilet training before he or she is ready, this could result in a stressful situation for both of you.

What are some signs that a child is ready for toilet training?

- ☆ An interest in wearing underpants instead of diapers
- ☆ The ability to stay dry for several hours at a stretch
- ☆ An interest in being clean and dry
- ☆ The ability to undress and dress oneself

What are some tips for making toilet training easier? Remember that you are dealing with a two- or three-year-old who likes to believe that he or she is controlling the situation. It is better to let the child have some choices. Parents generally have better success when they are not forcing the toilet training. The following are some tips for easing the stress of toilet training:

- ☆ Let the child choose some of the equipment he or she will need, for instance, underpants, a potty seat, a book or video about toilet training.
- ☆ Make full use of those props—the books or videos or dolls that drink and wet.
- ☆ Make it easy for your child by having potties that are readily accessible.
- ☆ While you can suggest that your child may want to try the toilet, it is difficult to force the child to actually use it.
- ☆ Aim for consistency in toilet training among caregivers, for instance, with your daycare provider or babysitter.
- ☆ When you are out, be especially patient. You will soon learn where the closest restroom is in every grocery store, restaurant, and mall.

Expect mistakes! Toilet training generally takes several weeks or more for the child who is ready. If it is taking longer, maybe your child isn’t yet ready, and you should try again in a few weeks. Even for the child who is making progress, there will be plenty of mistakes. Be prepared to accept them with good humor and to appreciate that this is just part of normal toilet training. Reward your child with praise and congratulations when he or she uses the potty, and be sympathetic when there are mistakes. (Children who are punished for toileting mistakes may end up becoming more resistant to using the toilet altogether.) Finally, congratulate yourself on your patience, and celebrate with your child when you make it through the first “dry” day.

For more information about toilet training and other child development topics, visit the websites for the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org) or the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org).

