

When's the right time to start using a potty?

The key to potty training success is starting when your son is ready. If you begin before this, the process will take longer to complete. He may be ready at the age of 18 months, or it may not be until he is four years old. Boys tend to stay in nappies for a few months longer than girls. If he has older siblings, he may learn faster than if he was a first-born.

If your son is ready to start, focus on timing. If he's just changed his nursery or has a brand new sibling, it may not be a good time. He may be less open to change, or feel too overwhelmed to tackle this new challenge. Waiting will ensure that you get potty training off to the best start.

What potty-training equipment will I need?

Start with buying a potty that your toddler can call his own. This will make it easier and less daunting for him than using a full-sized toilet, at least to begin with. He can hop on and off a potty and it can be easily moved from room to room. Some toddlers are anxious about falling into the toilet, and this anxiety can sometimes interfere with potty training.

 You could try a training seat which fits on top of your toilet seat. But make sure it feels comfy and secure, and attaches firmly. You'll also need a footstep which will allow your toddler to climb on and off the seat easily and stabilise himself while he's sitting on it. Reading a fun picture book or watching a DVD about potty training may help him to learn.

How should we get started with potty training?

Toddlers learn by imitation, and watching you go to the loo is a natural first step. A male role model helps, so let your son follow Daddy, an uncle, or a good family friend, to the bathroom to watch how they wee. He may notice that Daddy uses the toilet differently from Mummy, which allows you to explain the basic mechanics of how boys use a toilet.

 Your child needs to get used to the idea of using a potty. Tell him that the potty or potty chair is his very own and let him decorate it with stickers.

 Start by suggesting that he sits on the potty with his nappy off. If your toddler has a favourite teddy, you could use it for potty demonstrations.

If he is at all resistant, don't pressure him. That will just set up a power struggle that could derail the entire process.

How can I motivate him to use the potty?

 Take him shopping to choose his own underwear. Superhero pants, or ones emblazoned with favourite animated characters, are always popular. Some toddlers get very motivated by keeping Thomas the Tank Engine nice and dry.

Talk up the outing in advance so he gets excited about being old enough to use the potty and wear proper underwear, just like Daddy or his big brother.

When can we banish nappies?

Consistency is vital. If your son is at nursery or with a childminder, nanny or relatives, you'll need to make sure you're all using the same approach.

Ideally, you should go straight to full-time underwear in the day to prevent your toddler from becoming confused. Though pull-ups are an option, real pants or washable cloth training pants will allow your son to feel more immediately when he's wet. Though be ready for accidents along the way.

If you can't decide what to do for the best, talk to other parents about what they did. For a while, at least, you'll want to continue using nappies or disposable pants at night and on long trips.

What about the mechanics of weeing and pooing?

As poos and wees often come at the same time, your son should start with sitting down for both. He'll then learn that both belong in the potty. And he won't get distracted by the fun of spraying and learning to aim when you need him to concentrate on just mastering the basic procedure.

When he's comfortable on his potty or toilet-training seat, let him give standing at the toilet a try. Though you will need a footstep for him to stand on at first.

 Let him take his time. If he's reluctant, try floating a few Cheerios in the toilet bowl for target practice. Expect to clean up a few messes as your son perfects his aim.

How will he recognise the signs of needing a wee?

Time spent without clothes may help him to recognise when it's time to go.

 Put the potty in an accessible place while he plays, and encourage him to sit on it now and again. Prepare for the occasional puddle, and place plastic over your carpet to protect it.

Watch for signs that he has to go, such as clutching himself, wriggling, or hopping up and down in one place. Use these cues to tell him it's potty time. Saying, "Have a wee, and then we can go to the swings," will work better than asking him if he wants to go.

Try this naked time on several consecutive days, in the evenings, or just at weekends. The more time your child spends out of nappies, the faster he'll learn.

When should I praise him during potty training?

After a few inevitable accidents, your son will enjoy the accomplishment of getting something in the potty. Celebrate this milestone with a reward. So watch a new DVD, or read him an extra bedtime story.

But don't make a huge fuss after every trip to the potty, as it may cause him to feel self-conscious due to all that attention.

How should I deal with potty-training accidents?

Stay calm and remember that it's all part of the process. The more he uses the potty, the better he'll be at it.

Even children who have used the toilet successfully for months occasionally have accidents. Telling your child off for wetting his pants might mean more months of nappies, rather than fewer.

Dress him in loose-fitting clothes that he can easily take off. But if he still wets his pants, don't overreact or punish him. Nothing can disrupt potty training faster than making a child feel bad for having an accident.

How can I make potty training fun?

If you approach potty training with a little imagination, your child may be more likely to stay motivated.



Drip some blue or red food colouring into the toilet and your child will be amazed at how he can turn the water green or orange. Put several favourite books next to the toilet so he can read them whenever he has to go, or read them to him.

If your child starts to lose interest despite being well into potty training, try rewards. Every time he goes to the toilet, or tells you that he needs to go, he gets a sticker that he can stick on a wallchart. Or a potty training app may make it more fun for him.

Watching the stickers accumulate could act as a real incentive. Then perhaps offer an additional reward such as a toy when he gets enough stickers, or stays dry for a certain number of days.