

## TOILET TRAINING

### A GUIDELINE FOR PARENTS

How do I toilet train my child? At what age should I start the training? These are common questions and concerns for parents with toddlers. The timing and method used to assist children in acquiring control over body functions depends on the child's readiness and the family's cultural practices. Toddlerhood is a time of transition from the child's total dependence on his/hers parents to the development of dressing, eating, and toileting. It is also a time of increasing communication skills and power struggles with parents, as the parent of any toddler will tell you. Keeping all of this in mind, how do you toilet train a toddler and at what age? In order to answer these questions, you must first identify if your child is ready for training, both physically and emotionally.

#### READINESS:

Signs that a child is physically ready for toilet training include:

1. The child is able to walk, bend over and stand up again without help. This identifies that the nerve fibers to the bladder and rectum are fully developed and the child can have control over these muscles. This usually happens between 18-24 months of age.
2. The child stays dry for 2 or more hours at a time.
3. The child is able to remove pants and underwear.
4. The child understands words associated with the toilet and uses them before needing to go to the bathroom.
5. The child urinates a large amount at one time rather than constant dribbling.

Signs that a child is emotionally ready for toilet training include:

1. The child is able to sit quietly for short periods of time.
2. The child is very interested in what is happening in the bathroom and watches his/her parents and sibling use the toilet.
3. The child understands the concept of "let go" and likes to put toys or objects where they belong.

Most children achieve bowel and bladder control at the same time. The average age that children achieve training is between 27-29 months, but it is not uncommon for some children to not be trained until around 36 months. Girls are often trained earlier than boys. Many children (30-40%) will continue to have bed wetting accidents until around age 5. How you choose to toilet train your child will depend on your attitudes about modesty, cleanliness, and if you are employed outside of the home and will need the assistance of a sitter in the training process. Parents need to discuss and agree on the method that will be used to provide consistency for the child.

After you have determined that your child is ready, how do you start? The following steps are one toilet training method.

1. Purchase a potty chair and place it in the bathroom. Tell the child that this is his/her chair. Talk to the child and explain what should happen in the chair, such as "this is where you go poop". Use consistent names for stool and urine so the child knows what you are talking about. Have the child sit on the chair dressed to become comfortable sitting on the chair. Allow the child to get up and leave when desired.
2. When the child feels comfortable sitting on the chair, have the child sit on the chair without clothes at a time a bowel movement is expected. Always allow the child to leave the chair when desired. If the child does stool in the chair, give a lot of praise and you may choose to offer a reward such as a sticker or M & M.
3. Do not scold the child if he/she wets soon after getting up from the chair.
4. Do not use phrases such as "good girl" or "bad girl". Using the toilet should have nothing to do with the child's self worth.

When you start the training process, buy some training pants for the child. Have the child help you choose the pants at the store and stress the fact that these are "big girl" or "big boy" panties and that you don't go potty in these panties like you do with diapers. Be sure to have the child in clothes that he/she can easily pull down or the child will be unable to succeed with the training. It is best to start training during a time when there is no change happening in the home, such as mother returning to work, or the birth of a sibling.

After the child has developed control, let the child be responsible for toileting. Tell the child you think they are able to handle it from now on and ask if they would like to do it by themselves. Show them where to get clean pants if an accident should happen and where to put soiled or wet pants. Do not change pants but let the child do it when ready. If the child is making no progress, you can say "maybe we need to wait until you are bigger before you can do this alone so we will go back to diapers for a while". Expect the child to regress and have accidents during times of stress such as during illness of self or parents, or after birth of sibling.

This is one suggested method that you may choose to try. There are many options and the one you choose must be appropriate for the individual child and family. No matter which method you may choose, it is important to remember to praise the child for success and to never punish the child for unsuccessful attempts. Punishment or forcing the child to sit on the toilet until he/she urinates or has a bowel movement can lead to toilet avoidance and bowel problems which will be difficult to correct.

#### SUGGESTED REFERENCES:

Mr. Rogers Neighborhood, Going To The Potty, by Fred Rogers;  
General Publishing Company.

No More Diapers, by Joal Graham Brooks, M.D.; Delacorte Press.

Toilet Learning, by Alison Mack; Little, Brown & Company.