

# LEARNING TO USE THE POTTY

## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Learning to use the potty is a big step for your child. It helps them feel proud and more in control of their body. Caregivers are often excited to say goodbye to diapers, but just like walking, potty learning takes time. Your child needs to be ready—and you can help them along the way. The **Early Connections team** has some ideas to help you on this journey.

## How do I know my child is ready?

Your child may be ready to start learning to use the potty if they:

- Watch other people use the toilet and seem curious
- Like to copy what adults or older kids do
- Can walk on their own and sit down by themselves
- Tell you what they need using words, signs, pointing, or leading you
- Stay dry for at least 2 hours at a time
- Feel uncomfortable in a wet or dirty diaper and ask to change their diaper
- Understand and follow simple directions
- Can pull pants up and down
- Want to do things by themselves

Most children show these signs of readiness sometime between ages **2 and 4 years old**.

## Steps to Potty Learning

1. Let your child **sit on the potty with their diaper on** so they can get used to it.
2. If you are okay with it, let them **watch you use the toilet** and explain what's happening.
3. When your child seems ready, **invite them to sit on the potty every couple of hours**—this time, without a diaper. Give them plenty of drinks so they'll have more chances to practice. Give your child foods with lots of fiber to avoid constipation (poop that is hard to pass).
4. When they start having more control, try using **padded underwear**. This can help them feel when they are wet and learn about their body.



## How can I help my child learn?

Potty learning is something you and your child do together. It can look different for every family. The most important thing is staying connected with your child. It is important to keep the process stress-free. Here's how you can help:

- **Wait for a calm time to start**—don't start during big changes like a move or illness.
- Use **simple words** like “pee” and “poop” so your child can tell you when they need to go.
  - If your child uses other ways to communicate, you can try **pictures, a bell, or an alarm** to help them show you when it's time.
- Help your child feel **comfortable and safe** in the bathroom.
  - Pay attention to things in the bathroom that might make your child feel scared or uneasy. For example:
    - Does the loud sound of the toilet flushing bother them?
    - Do they not like sitting on a cold seat?
    - Do they want the light on, or are they afraid to go in when it's dark?
  - **Use a potty or toilet seat** that's the right size for your child.
  - **Use a step stool** if your child needs help reaching the toilet or resting their feet.



## Tips and Reminders

- **Your child is in control** of their body. You can cheer them on, but you can't make them go. Stay calm and patient—they will learn in their own time.
- **Accidents will happen!** That's normal. Stay relaxed and supportive. Try saying something like: “Oops, your pants are wet. You didn't make it to the potty this time. That's okay. Let's get you cleaned up.”
- **Don't scold or act upset.** Your child isn't doing it on purpose. They're learning!
- **Take a break.** If your child is having lots of accidents and it's starting to feel stressful, it's okay to take a break. Try again when they're ready.
- **Encourage your child.** When your child does use the potty, keep your response calm and encouraging. Try saying: “You went poo-poo in the potty. You look really proud. You're learning how to go!”
- Focus on **how your child feels**—not just how excited you are. Too much praise can feel like pressure.

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## Which stories can help teach about potty training?

- **Everyone Poops** by Taro Gomi
- **Potty** by Leslie Patricelli
- **The Potty Train** by David Hochman
- **Going to the Potty** by Fred Rogers

## What should I keep in mind when potty training?

Learning to use the toilet takes time, and every child is different. Some kids start earlier, and some take longer. Every child learns to use the toilet at their own pace. Your child may learn to control their poop first, or they may learn to control their pee first — both are normal.

If your child is still working on other skills or has medical needs, potty learning may begin later and take more time. Be patient—your child will get there with your support. Staying dry at night usually happens much later. This often happens after your child is already using the potty well during the day. Keep diapers on at night until your child regularly wakes up with a dry diaper.

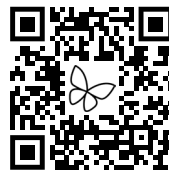
Sometimes children take a step back with potty skills. Big changes, getting sick, or stress can sometimes cause accidents to start again. This is normal. If things don't get better after a little while, you can talk to your child's doctor or a therapist.

## When should I talk to my child's doctor?

Sometimes kids don't want to use the toilet. You might find yourself getting upset or in a power struggle with your child. You can talk to your child's doctor to make sure there are no medical problems making it harder for them to learn.



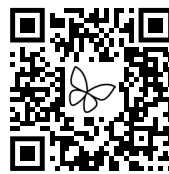
## Where can I find more information?



### ATN/AIR-P Toilet Training Guide

*Autism Speaks*

Guide <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/atnair-p-toilet-training-guide>



### Potty Training: Learning to the Use the Toilet

*ZERO TO THREE*

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/potty-training-learning-to-the-use-the-toilet/>



### Toilet Learning: Steps to Success

*ZERO TO THREE*

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/toilet-learning-steps-to-success/>



## STEIN TIKUN OLAM EARLY CONNECTIONS PROGRAM CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES

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