



gretchen's
house

So you want to know more about...

Toilet Learning

Off We Go!

Most children are successfully toilet “trained” at around 3 years of age (nighttime training may take a year or so longer).

Actual **toilet learning** begins much earlier, usually between 18 and 24 months of age when toddlers start making connections between sensations and events. This is also the age when children become very intent upon imitating adult behavior. These two developments signal the cognitive awareness necessary for children to understand what’s involved in using the toilet.

There are many skills children must master first — recognizing the sensations of a full bladder or needing to have a bowel movement; attending to these

sensations even when they are deeply involved in play or otherwise distracted; verbalizing their needs, and delaying “gratification” until they are on the toilet.

The best advice that we have for parents is to **relax**. Children are ultimately the only ones who decide where and when they want to go to the bathroom. No amount of coercion will convince them otherwise and may simply strengthen their resolve to delay the process.

Adults *can* and should be alert for the following **signs of readiness**:

- Staying dry for one or more hours.
- Having bowel movements at

predictable times.

- Curiosity about toileting.
- Discomfort in a soiled diaper.
- Seeking privacy for bowel movements.
- Verbal expressions of interest.

Sometimes children choose to concentrate their efforts at home or at the center. If our teachers see signs of readiness in your child and they haven’t heard about this development from you, they’ll let you know what they see. Our preschool spaces also have potty charts in their bathrooms to help track children’s progress.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please feel free to speak with a teacher or director. We’re here to help!

Setting the Stage

- Describe what you’re doing and seeing at diaper changes. “Your diaper is wet,” or, “You pooped.”
- Don’t show disgust at your child’s dirty diapers. His bowel movements are something he made, he’s proud of them!
- Let your child watch you dump the b.m. out of their cloth or disposable diaper and flush the toilet, as you point out, “This is where poop belongs.”
- Have a potty chair or seat available for exploration long before your child may be ready to use it.
- As appropriate, let your child watch you or an older sibling use the bathroom. Let your son stand or sit as he prefers.
- If your child urinates or poops in the bathtub or on the floor, be matter of fact. “Oops, that belongs in the potty. Let’s clean it up.”

Further reading

- ▶ *Toilet Training: A Practical Guide to Daytime and Nighttime Training*
Vicki Lansky
- ▶ *Once Upon a Potty*
Alona Frankel
- ▶ *The New Potty*
Gina Mayer
- ▶ *The Princess and the Potty*
Wendy Cheyette Lewison

Ready, Set, Go!

Most children follow this pattern (at different rates) as they learn to use the toilet.

Stage 1: Awareness

1. Labeling their status: “dry,” “wet,” “poopy.”
2. Identifying the action *as they do it*.
3. Peeing or pooping when their diaper is off and trying to explore their creation.
4. Going to the bathroom at predictable times — upon waking, after meals, before a bath.

Adults should consistently offer the use of the potty at diaper changes, after meals, before baths, etc. This should be a casual suggestion, *not* an opportunity for a power struggle. If the child declines, don't persist.

Stage 2: Hit or Miss

Children are interested in sitting on the potty now. They may

only pass gas or not quite make it to the toilet, but they are trying. They may start keeping their diapers dry for several hours, or waiting for a fresh diaper to poop. They may ask to use the toilet all the time without much “production”...be patient. This is how they figure out exactly **when** they need to go and **how** to get to the potty *in time*.

Stage 3: The Commitment

Once your child stays dry for several hours and uses the toilet on your or their request, it is time to try underpants. Start with a few hours at a stretch, and increase use with success. Build more time into your schedule for the morning routine, running errands, etc. so you can accommodate all last-minute potty requests.

At Gretchen's House we don't use material rewards for toilet learning because we believe they diminish children's intrinsic motivation.

Dress for Success

Yippee! Your child is wearing underpants! The clothes he or she wears to childcare or preschool can be a big factor in his/her success away from home. Remember that teachers are responsible for several children at a time, and seconds can seem like an eternity to a child who is hustling to get to the potty. Here's what we recommend for a wardrobe:

- Thick cotton “training” underpants. Colorful character underwear is thin and not absorbent enough. It's also more disappointing to kids if they soil these very precious underpants! Save them for later in the process.
- Pull-on pants or shorts...sweatpants are great. Clothes with buttons, zippers, and buckles are counterproductive.
- No overalls — they're like straightjackets!
- Pack **several** sets of extra pants, undies, and socks, as well as a diaper for nap.
- No pull-ups, please! These wick moisture away so the child either can't tell they've had an accident, or has no incentive to make the effort if he or she is unmotivated.

Accidents Happen

Why do kids who appear to be well on their way to being toilet trained have accidents?

- They forget to listen to their body's cues or are too engrossed in something else to attend to them;
- They may be experiencing stress: the birth of a sibling, having a parent out of town, changes at childcare, etc.;
- Older children may have “accidents” as a means of acting out or gaining “power.”
- Nighttime wetting may occur for up to a year after a child stays dry all day.

Here is how we address accidents at the center:

- Discreetly state the problem. “Your pants are wet. You need to change them.”
- Have the child participate in the clean-up process: wiping him or herself (front to back), finding clean clothes, helping clean up.
- Say something supportive: “Oops. Next time I'll help you remember to try to go sooner.”

Frequent accidents can indicate that a child is not ready for, or interested in, wearing underwear. They may also indicate a urinary tract or other infection. If a medical problem is not the cause of repeated accidents, we will take a break from active training and try again when we see more signs of progress.