

# Parenting News

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## Learning to use the potty

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When a baby learns to stand and walk, parents may begin thinking about teaching the child to use the potty: “Getting Jason out of diapers will be great!” The key is not when you are ready, but when the child is ready. Problems in teaching children to use the potty almost always come from trying too soon. Typically, girls are ready before boys. Some children are ready around age 1, while others are not ready until age 3 or older.

### When is a child ready?

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Learning to use the toilet can start when a child has:

#### 1. Physical ability

- is able to walk .
- has a larger bladder, so urinates fewer times a day.
- wakes up from a nap with a dry diaper.
- can control the muscles that hold and release urine and bowel movements.
- can take underwear off and put it back on.

#### 2. Mental ability

- understands the body’s signals for needing to use the toilet.
- understands words such as “peepee”, “poopoo” and “potty”.
- understands what is expected. That is, the child understands when to go, what to do, and where to do it.

#### 3. Social and emotional ability

- can express needs. That is, Callie expresses discomfort when she soils a diaper and tells you about it.
- wants to learn to use the toilet.

When all these abilities are in place, children can move out of diapers easily. A child who is not ready may resist learning, and parents may become frustrated. Don’t force it!

### How can you help your child learn?

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When your child is ready, you can make learning easier. Some tips:

- Talk with your caregiver. Parents and caregivers should agree on when a child is ready and what to do.
- Make sure the child can easily get to the toilet. Provide a potty chair in the bathroom. Or place a sturdy step stool by the toilet. Place toilet paper within easy reach.
- Dress the child in clothing that is easy to take off. These might include a dress, a skirt, or pants with an elastic waist.
- Use cloth training pants. Disposable paper training pants will seem like diapers to a child.
- Help your child overcome any fear of the toilet. The deep hole and loud flushing noise can seem scary.
- Watch for signs that a child may need to go. This might include a frown or action such as holding the crotch.
- When the child urinates or has a bowel

movement in the toilet, say, “*That’s good.*”  
Avoid making too much of it. Children  
need to learn to use the toilet for  
themselves, not to satisfy you.

- Never scold or shame a child for an accident. These are natural body functions, and children easily forget and get distracted.
- If a child has lots of accidents, go back to diapers for a while. Try again when the child seems ready.

Go slowly. Learning these skills takes time.

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ready, but when the child is ready.**

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