

Potty Training is a Full-Time Job

Ready to start potty training your child? Block out three to five days and plan to stay at home, advises CHOC pediatric gastroenterologist Mitchell Katz, M.D. He says potty training is a full-time job requiring your complete attention, repeated reminders, and enticing rewards.

“Many parents are under the misconception that putting a potty chair in the bathroom and waiting for the child to use it is all it takes,” Dr. Katz says. “You have to keep reminding the child to use it.” He also points out that many parents encourage the use of the toilet at home during training, but not everywhere else. It may be more convenient to use a diaper while running errands, but it sends a confusing message to the child.

Ready, Set – Go!

The following positive reinforcement techniques will encourage your child to adopt this new behavior more quickly.

- Let your child pick out “big kid” underwear. This is one of the rewards your child will be working for.
- Provide a comfortable toilet. Whether it is an insert placed on top of your toilet, or a potty chair, be sure your child is seated comfortably. If you are using an insert, be sure your child has a footrest.
- Ditch the diapers. Make a big deal of it, and then instruct your child to come to you when the urge arises to use the potty. Keep reminding your child to do this during the next few days. (Diapers are okay at night during the transition.)
- Send your child outside to play-without pants. This way, any accidents may be easily cleaned up.
- Push the liquids. The more often your child uses the bathroom, the more quickly the skill will be mastered. Salty snacks are helpful.
- Celebrate success. After your child successfully uses the toilet the first time, make a big deal out of it. Call your spouse at work and put your child on the phone to discuss the accomplishment.
- Reward a job well done. Rewards should be immediate, desired, and repeatable. Consider wrapping up some small, inexpensive toys. Every time your child uses the toilet, make a big fuss and reward them immediately.

“Punishment has no place in potty training. It’s all about enticement and rewards,” Dr. Katz says.