

From Diapers to Underwear: The Toilet Learning Journey

Key steps:

1. Look for readiness.
2. Prepare yourself and *commit to the journey*.
3. Set the environment up for independence and success.
4. Be prepared for missteps and be consistent.
5. Give it time.

Look for Readiness:

- Your child must first develop muscle control. Having muscle control looks like:
 - Being able to stand and walk independently. This usually occurs between 12 and 14 months of age.
- Your child will start to be dry for longer periods of time.
- Your child may begin hiding or seeking privacy when eliminating.
- Your child may begin communicating when they are wet or have a bowel movement, using their own words.

Adult Preparation and Commitment:

Many parents are hesitant to switch their children out of diapers and into underwear. They are comfortable with their current routine and don't want to be nervous about an elimination mess happening at an inconvenient time or place. However, switching back and forth between underwear and diapers can hinder the child's progress. When you're ready to begin, switch to thick underwear so your child can feel when they are wet. Have them sit on the potty every 30 minutes for at least 30 seconds so they have plenty of opportunities to go in the toilet. ***Stay consistent with the routine, even if the child does not eliminate in the toilet at the beginning.***

Set Your Child up for independence:

Establishing a bathroom routine and environment that allows your child to function independently will promote confidence and success as they navigate toilet learning.

- Clothing that is easy to manage - Pants with elastic waist bands, no tight cuffs at the ankle, no skirts, shoes that can be easily wiped clean, thick underwear to absorb some of urine if they don't make it to the toilet.
- Create a child-sized area in the bathroom that allows the child to find their own underwear, toilet paper, wipes, extra clothing. Provide a space for a small training toilet or provide access to the toilet that they can navigate independently.
- Before your child transitions to toilet learning, be sure to encourage independent dressing and undressing, and begin changing their diapers standing up. Allow them to pull their pants up and down on their own and collaborate in the process of caring for their bodily needs.

Elimination is a normal process, and we can explain that our bodies eliminate the waste from the food we eat. We put it in the toilet to keep the germs and smells out of our home. It is important not to give them a negative feeling towards these bodily functions, for example, by making faces when changing their diaper. Use correct and specific language.

Prepare for some mess:

Just as any other major milestone brings some failed attempts, toilet learning will as well.

- In order to minimize the stress or feelings of inadequacy that can come with soiling their clothes, it's important that the parent prepares themselves and the environment. Prepare yourself with cleaning products, water proof bags, and a plan to manage the mess. One set for home, one for the car.
- Use appropriate language to guide your child when they have soiled their clothes. For example, *"You have urine on your pants, urine goes in the toilet."* Avoid using negatives such as *"don't pee in your pants."* Be direct, and avoid shame, *"Your pants are wet, do you feel that? Urine goes in the toilet."*
- Create a plan for travel, pack accordingly, and keep a learning toilet and wipes in your car. Set an alarm to remind yourself to make a toileting stop. Make sure your child understands that not getting to the toilet every time is normal and nothing to be ashamed of. But do have them be as independent as possible changing soiled clothes.

Give it Time:

Children rarely make linear progress during toilet learning. There will be plenty of times when it feels like they are making great progress, only to be followed by a surprise incident or regression. As your child continues to learn and grow, help them focus on the feeling of being wet and dry. Emphasize the unique sensations that our bodies use to let us know it is time to get to the toilet.

If they do miss the toilet, allow them to help clean up. And when there are big life changes in your family, expect that your child will likely go through a regression – which is completely normal. But even if they ask for a diaper, stick to your message and process: we eliminate in the toilet.

It is helpful for them to see you using the toilet too. =)

Every child is developmentally different, some may jump quickly into underwear, others may have many soiled clothes before recognizing their bodies elimination cues. Stay consistent, patient, and remember that your child will be successful in underwear, in their own time and with your support. Provide them with the tools and environment they need to succeed and be patient as they navigate this new chapter. The journey certainly will have bumps along the way but usually results in a big confidence boost for your child when they have mastered it.