Ready to Go!

Toilet Time

A Guide for Parents

This guide contains everything parents need to make toilet training a success.

Expert child psychologist Dr. Janet Hall explains the facts about toilet training, lists what to do before you begin, and outlines six easy steps for success. This guide includes handy checklists to ensure both parents and children are ready to start toilet training, a range of troubleshooting tips, and a list of Do's and Don'ts to keep in mind.

Learn how to toilet train while supporting and motivating your child through this important developmental stage.



Dr. Janet Hall is a clinical psychologist and mother of two. For almost 40 years, Janet has treated thousands of children who have experienced problems staying dry and clean—day or night. She is the author of several books and audio programs on helping children with self-esteem and putting an end to temper tantrums.

BARRON'S

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Six-step guide by expert child psychologist Dr. Janet Hall



Do's	Don'ts
DO use the Child Readiness Checklist (page 6) and consider age, ego, and environment.	DON'T put pressure on your child. Result: Pressure can contribute to wetting.
DO praise all positive attempts and offer rewards.	DON'T start too early. Result: There is evidence that some bed-wetters and elderly incontinent folk were toilet trained at an early age.
DO provide your child with a nutritious diet and lots of water.	DON'T punish. Result: An urge for revenge may develop.
DO remain matter of fact, and stay calm about accidents.	DON'T restrict drinks. Result: Your child will be thirsty, and functional bladder capacity is kept small.
DO stick to one proven method.	DON'T give too much junk food or soft drinks. Result: Constipation or soiling may occur, and an "itchy and scratchy" bladder may cause wet underwear and bed-wetting.
DO dress your child in loose, practical clothes.	DON'T give your child lots of attention during diaper changes. Result: Your child might "play up" to get more attention.
	DON'T show your frustration. Result: Your child loses motivation.
	DON'T over-prompt or wake your child to go to the toilet. Result: Your child may always rely on you to remind them to go.

The Facts

Development of Control

To be able to be toilet trained, toddlers have to learn to control the impulse to spontaneously "let it all out." Control comes with maturation of the central nervous system. The toddler can then take voluntary control over the bladder (urine) and anal (fecal) sphincter muscles that control elimination.

In order to toilet train, you and your child must be able to communicate. So, it's a good idea to use child-friendly terms. It doesn't matter what terms you use, so long as your child understands what you're talking about.

Remember that some toddlers will seem to be responding to training and automatically "do something" as soon as their bottom touches the toilet or potty. However, this probably isn't true toilet training. For true voluntary control to develop, the toddler needs to be motivated to want to use the control in order to stay dry and clean.



What Influences Development of Control?

Age

Awareness of the results of wetting usually begins between 15 and 18 months. Awareness of the internal sensation of needing to do wee occurs from 20 months. By the age of three-and-a-half, most children can recognize the sensation of a full bladder and hold on until they are at a toilet.

Night control usually develops later than day control and doesn't necessarily respond to special training. As night control develops naturally, it's important to avoid pressure on day training.

Some children achieve bowel control at two years, while others take longer.

Ego

As well as developing bladder and bowel control, toddlers are developing a healthy ego. Most of their words are egocentric—me, mine, me want, etc. They are push–pulled between wanting to please and wanting to be grown-up. The opportunities to exert their ego by withholding or letting go of wee or poo in public is immensely empowering.

> The age when a child is toilet trained is not usually reflective of their intelligence. Bright children can be difficult to train, but so can emotionally or intellectually "slower" children.

Professional help

If you're worried, seek professional help rather than hope your child will grow out of it. One session with a professional can be extremely reassuring and may provide helpful resources. Contact your doctor, health care professional, or psychologist.

Punishment

Children can perceive disapproving looks, so be careful of your body language. Punishment for an accident is NEVER appropriate. And don't use words like "yucky" or "stinky," as they may make your child ashamed of their bodily functions.

Rewards

Praise your child in the early stages of toilet training for any indication that they're participating. Choose rewards that are appropriate for your child's age—young children may thrive on jellybeans while four-year olds may need stickers and wall charts.

It's important to give the reward immediately, as children this age have little sense of time. Gradually stop rewards as your child becomes more independent.

Sticky bottom

Bottom wiping is not a skill that comes easily. Give your child lots of reassurance. Sometimes, you may need to provide baby wipes. Teach your child to wipe and "look" to see when the paper is clean. Remember to teach your daughter to wipe from front to back to avoid infection.

Physical problems

In rare cases, a child's urinary tract or bowel may function abnormally. Ask your doctor for a referral to a specialist pediatrician.

Power struggles

If you and your child have head-to-head battles about toilet training, don't worry. Your child will nearly always win. It's better to wait to demonstrate than to force the issue. Forced toilet training may cause problems later.



Environment

Factors that affect the environment include modeling and physical ease of toileting.

Family attitudes and demonstrations of positive toileting are important. It may be embarrassing for a parent to demonstrate, but children learn best from watching others, so overcome your inhibitions and show them how easy it is (including breath work and grunts)!

If in any doubt with toilet training, WAIT! Don't toilet train your child because:

- it's the holidays or it's just before or after the holidays;
- the rest of your mothers' group is starting;
- your mother-in-law says it's time; or
- YOU were trained at that age.

The best environment for training is when the weather is warm, there is a lull in toddler aggression/defiance and there are no big changes about to occur in your life.



Before You Begin

Refer to the checklists on pages 6 and 7 and consider the following.

When Is the Right Time?

It may be the right time if your child:

- shows discomfort at wet or soiled diapers;
- lets you know they are wet or soiled;
- asks to go to the toilet;
- stays dry for at least two hours at a time during the day or is dry after a daytime sleep; or
- has regular bowel movements.

Toilet or Potty?

There are a variety of potties and toilet seats to choose from, but don't dwell on your choice—your child may decide for you. If you have one toilet or an upstairs toilet, a potty may be more convenient. If using a potty, keep it in the same place.

Introduction of the Toilet or Potty

Introduce your child to the potty or toilet by telling them what it's for and encouraging them to sit on it. Tell a story, sing a song, or provide snacks and a drink to keep your child interested in sitting.

Childcare

It can be difficult if your child is in childcare to decide on the right time to toilet train. Some parents stay home, while others rely on childcare workers. Most childcare workers are happy to follow your directions, and your child should respond well if the method is consistently applied.

Constipation

Sometimes, despite good diet, exercise, and lots of water, your child becomes constipated. This may happen because your child is scared of the toilet. Over time, impacted feces can build up in the bowel. "Sneaky poo" can seep around the blockage and appear on your child's underwear. If your child complains of a sore tummy and you find "skid marks" on the underwear, go to the doctor.

Diet

A well-balanced diet with lots of water and fiber is essential for a healthy elimination system. If in doubt, consult your dietician, doctor, or health care professional.

Exercise

Remember that children often do wee and poo after a sleep, a meal, or exercise. Keep your child active, but be ready for the sudden explosion!

Going out

When going out, make sure your child knows where the toilet is. Always dress your child in loose, practical clothes and take changes. Remember to prompt.

Trouble-Shooting Tips

Accidents

Accidents are likely if your child is:

- tired;
- over-excited;
- angry; or
- even cold!

Give these accidents little attention.

Your child may also have an accident or relapse if you're away, there's a death in the family or the birth of a sibling or they're sick. Your child needs love and reassurance at this time, so you may need to stop training temporarily. It's better to wait until everyone relaxes before beginning again.

Asking too late

If your child frequently asks too late, be very patient. The fact that they're coming to ask you means they're gaining control and know what they should have done. Praise your child, and if necessary, decrease the gap between prompts.

When your child makes it, give praise and use a sticker sheet or a motivation reward chart.

Developmental delay

Some children are just slow learners. Whatever time is right for them will be the right time for their development.

Best Time to Sit

The best time to sit on the toilet is after a meal, waking up, or exercise. As there is increased likelihood of a result at these times, stay close to provide praise. If your child is not willing to sit, don't force them.

Create a Nice Space

Here are some ideas to create a nice space. Provide:

- a step to get onto the toilet;
- a special toilet seat;
- a book to share with your child while they sit on the toilet (such as the book in this kit);
- a heater to stay warm;
- colorful reward charts (such as the ones in this kit) or posters on the wall; or
- a special toy.

Training Pants

Cloth training pants and regular underwear help train but don't provide protection in case of accidents. "Pull up" training pants are marketed to assist in toilet training, but research isn't conclusive about how beneficial they are for toilet training. However, they can help with the transition to underwear and also support your need for security in case of accidents.

When it's time to introduce training pants, give praise and show your child how to pull them on and off.

Child Readiness Checklist

1. Does my child "let go" of a consistent amount of urine all at once? ❑
2. Does my child have periods of dryness between diaper changes? ❑
3. Does my child know the meaning of the words "wet" and "dry?" ❑
4. Can my child follow at least five different brief instructions? ❑
5. Can my child:
   - pull up and pull down underwear? ❑
   - unfasten clothes? ❑
   - sit on the toilet? ❑
   - flush the toilet? ❑
   - wash and dry hands? ❑

   (Note that bottom wiping is a complicated skill and develops over time!)
6. Is my child well and healthy? ❑
7. Is my child eating an adequate diet? ❑
8. Does my child respond well to praise and other rewards? ❑

Positive Parent Toilet-Training Checklist

1. I am aware of the facts about bladder/bowel function ❑
2. I am motivated and believe that we can do this together ❑
3. I am relaxed and can create a relaxing atmosphere for my child ❑
4. My child wears loose, practical clothing ❑
5. I am "matter-of-fact" about bodily functions ❑
6. I understand the importance of choosing one well-founded approach to toilet training and using it consistently. ❑
7. I am ready for the Six Easy Toilet Training Steps:
   - i. Learn by being told ❑
   - ii. Learn by showing or imitation ❑
   - iii. Practice ❑
   - iv. Managing accidents ❑
   - v. Motivation by praise, encouragement, and rewards ❑
   - vi. Prompting ❑
8. My child scores highly on the Child Readiness Checklist (page 6) ❑
9. I have chosen the optimum time to begin toilet training ❑
10. The environment I provide is clean, bright, and safe ❑

5. Motivation by Praise, Encouragement, and Rewards

Children will do anything for praise, so be specific. Say, "Mommy (or Daddy) is very proud of you being a big boy (or girl) and doing wee in the toilet. Let's call Nanny and tell her."

For children who are successfully using the toilet, but are still having occasional "wets," a daily reward may be sufficient. Use the charts in this kit, which feature reward stickers that can be added to the picture if an entire dry day occurs. This is a good way to positively reinforce successes without highlighting failures.

6. Prompting

After practices with the toy, you're ready to start prompting your child to go independently.

At first, prompt directly at frequent intervals, e.g., every hour. After successful direct prompts, the next step is to ask, perhaps after an hour, if the child needs to go to the toilet. Finally, remind your child at mid-morning, "Remember to go to the toilet."

When your child is independent, parental advice isn't needed and may be resented.

> Don't keep sending your child to the toilet when they've got the general idea. They need to learn the "feel" of a full bladder. The longer they hold on, the better their bladder capacity will be.

Parent Readiness Checklist

1. Do I have the materials I need?
   - A toy ❑
   - Clean changes of training pants or underwear ❑
   - Supplies of different kinds of drinks my child likes ❑
   - Supplies of different snacks my child likes ❑
   - A list of people who will be excited to learn my child is being dry ❑
2. Do I have the time? ❑
3. Do I have a positive attitude? ❑
4. Do I have the patience? ❑
5. Is this the RIGHT time (weather, events in our lives, family is supportive)? ❑



Six Easy Toilet Training Steps

These are the six easy steps for easy daytime toilet training.

1. Learn by Being Told

Be clear in what you communicate to your child. Use short, simple instructions.

2. Learn by Showing or Imitation

There are two types of learning by showing or imitation:

a. Toy successfully does wee in the potty:
Choose a toy your child likes to demonstrate successful toileting, such as a doll or teddy. Sit the toy on the toilet and pretend the toy has a drink and does wee. You don't need to pour drink down the mouth, just pour any liquid—call it "pretend wee"—into the toilet underneath the toy. Show how pleased you are and give the toy a treat. As the toy can't eat the treat, give it to your child as a reward for watching! Repeat three times. In theory, your child will want to do a wee to get the treat.

b. Parent shows by example:
You successfully "practice" on the toilet in front of your child three times.

3. Practice

The child practices using the potty or toilet. If they don't do a wee, pour in some water to make "pretend wee."

Remember to practice dressing and undressing and getting to and from the toilet.

4. Managing Accidents

First, practice with the toy.

a. Model what happens if the toy gets wet three times. When the toy's underwear is checked, say, "Oh, Teddy (or toy's name) is wet." In a firm tone, say, "No, you need to wee in the toilet, not in your underwear." The toy then demonstrates responsibility for being wet.

b. Your child practices with the toy. They act as the "parent," taking charge of the toy and putting it through three practices of the same routine.

If your child really does wet, express mild disapproval and encourage underwear change and clean-up. Try to avoid eye contact and engagement during the clean-up. Be matter of fact so your child doesn't get positive attention, as that may accidentally reward the behavior.

