



PATIENT EDUCATION

*Helping Your Child Learn  
to Use the Toilet*

MAYO CLINIC CHILDREN'S CENTER



BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS  
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

## Mayo Clinic Children's Center

*For more than 100 years, teams of physicians have cared for children at Mayo Clinic.*

### T. DENNY SANFORD PEDIATRIC CENTER

### MAYO EUGENIO LITTA CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

*Pediatric Sub-Specialties in the following areas:*

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Allergy and Immunology	General Pediatric and	Plastic and Reconstructive
Anesthesiology	Adolescent Medicine	Surgery
Cardiology	Gynecology, Adolescent	Psychiatry and Psychology
Cardiovascular Surgery	Hematology and Oncology	Pulmonology
Child and Family	Infectious Diseases	Radiation Oncology
Advocacy Program	Medical Genetics	Radiology
Community Pediatrics and	Neonatal Medicine	Regional (Health System)
Adolescent Medicine	Nephrology	Pediatrics
Critical Care	Neurology	Research
Dermatology	Neurosurgery	Rheumatology
Developmental and	Ophthalmology	Sleep Medicine Center
Behavioral Pediatrics	Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	Speech Pathology
Emergency Medicine	Orthopedic Surgery	Surgery
Endocrinology and Metabolism	Otorhinolaryngology (ENT)	Urology
Gastroenterology and	Physical Medicine and	
Hepatology	Rehabilitation	

### *Pediatric Specialty Clinics:*

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Adrenoleukodystrophy Clinic	Dermatology Genetics Clinic	Neonatal Follow-Up Clinic
Aerodigestive Clinic	Diabetes Clinic	Neuromuscular Clinic
Anxiety Disorders Clinic and	Eating Disorders Clinic	Pain Clinic
Intensive Therapy Program	Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic	Pain Rehabilitation Center
Arrhythmia and Device	Epilepsy Clinic	Pediatric Diagnostic Referral
Placement Clinic	Erythromelalgia Clinic	Clinic
Asthma Center	Facial Paralysis and	Pediatric Level 1 Trauma Center
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity	Reanimation Clinic	Plagiocephaly Program
Disorders (ADHD) Clinic	Feeding Program	Pulmonary Hypertension
Bariatric Surgery Clinic	Fertility Preservation	Program
Brain Injury Program	Fetal Surgery Program	Renal Stone Clinic
Brain Tumor Clinic	Friedreich's Ataxia Clinic	Spina Bifida Clinic
Cerebral Palsy Clinic	Functional Movement	Spinal Deformities Clinic
Chemotherapy/Radiation	Disorder Program	Sports Medicine Center
Long-Term Effects Clinic	Heart Failure Clinic	Thyroid Nodule/Cancer Clinic
Child and Adolescent Intensive	Hemophilia/Coagulopathy Clinic	Transgender Clinic
Mood Program (CAIMP)	Hyperlipidemia Program	Transitions Program
Childhood Sarcoma Clinic	Immunodeficiency Disorders	Transplant Center
CompPASS (Palliative Care and	Clinic	Travel Clinic
Integrative Medicine)	Inflammatory Bowel Disease	Vascular Malformations
Congenital Heart Clinic	Clinic	Velo-Pharyngeal
Constraint Induced Movement	Learning Disorders	Insufficiency Clinic
Therapy Program	Assessment Clinic	Voiding Clinic
Craniofacial Clinic	Long QT Syndrome Clinic	Weight Management Clinic
Cystic Fibrosis Center	Marfan Syndrome Clinic	
Dana Child Developmental and	Metabolic Bone Clinic	
Learning Disorders Program	Mood Disorders Clinic	

# Your Child's Readiness and Your Patience — Keys to Success

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Learning to use the toilet is a natural part of growing up. It is another step in your child's process to become independent. It is no different from learning to walk, drink from a cup, or do any of the thousands of other new skills children learn.

For the most part, children decide for themselves when they are ready to use the potty chair or toilet. Most want to learn when they are ready and are not forced. And, when they are ready, they succeed.

Your role is to be encouraging and to provide what is needed to help your child. Relax. You can do this. Your patience with your child and the time it takes to train can actually help toilet training be easier and quicker.

This information explains what to look for to determine whether your child is ready for potty training. It also includes suggestions for helping your child learn to use the toilet and for handling problems and accidents.

If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your child's health care provider.

# Watching for Your Child's Readiness

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Learning to use the toilet requires certain levels of physical, developmental and behavioral readiness. While many children show signs of being ready between ages 18 and 24 months, others might not be ready until they are 3 years old or older.

There is no need to rush the process. If you start too early, it might take longer for your child. A common cause of toilet training problems is that the child is not ready.

You most likely can recognize signs of your child being ready for toilet training. Ask yourself:

- Does my child seem interested in using the toilet or ask to use the toilet?
- Can my child walk to and sit on a toilet or potty chair?
- Can my child pull down his or her pants and pull them up again?
- Can my child stay dry for up to two hours during the day?
- Can my child understand and follow basic directions?
- Can my child tell someone when he or she needs to go?
- Does my child tell someone his or her diaper is wet or dirty and wants a diaper change?

If you answered mostly yes, your child might be ready. If you answered mostly no, you might want to wait. You especially may want to wait if your child is about to have a major change, such as a move or a new sibling. It is common for children to regress in toilet training if a major change happens during or after training.

Let your child's motivation lead the process, not your eagerness. Try not to equate potty training success or difficulty with your child's intelligence or stubbornness. And try not to compare your child's progress with others, including any siblings. Your child's journey is his or her own.



# How You Can Help Your Child

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Your readiness is important, too. Plan toilet training for when you can devote the time and energy to be consistent on a daily basis for a few months.

This information includes suggestions for when you begin to help your child learn to use the toilet.

## **Get prepared**

You may want to take your child with you to buy a potty chair. You can let your child choose the one he or she likes best.

Remove any urine deflector or shield that may come with the potty chair. Put the potty chair in the bathroom or, initially, in your child's bedroom.

To start out, encourage your child to sit on the potty chair while wearing clothes. Make sure your child's feet rest on the floor or a stool. This can help your child get used to the chair before using it for potty training.

Some people prefer their child use a potty seat that fits on the toilet. The child might start with a potty seat or switch to it after using a potty chair for a while. If using a potty seat, make sure your child uses a step stool to get on and off the seat. Your child should rest his or her feet on the stool while sitting on the toilet.

Use simple, positive words to talk about the toilet. Tell your child in the words you have chosen that his or her body makes urine and poop every day and they need to go in the potty. You might dump the contents of a dirty diaper into the potty chair and toilet to show its purpose. Have your child flush the toilet.

Let your child choose underwear. This can be fun for your child and it can help him or her feel in control.

How you have your child transition from diapers to underwear is your choice. You may or may not choose to buy disposable training pants to help with the change.

Many people find what works best is for their child to wear underwear while awake and a diaper or training pant only while sleeping. They use them only until their child most often stays dry during naps and overnight.

Since reading to children can be a positive experience for them, you may want to read books about the potty adventure to your child. Doing so can help you talk together about it. This helps with your child's understanding.

You may want to give your child some kind of reward for using the potty chair or toilet and for staying dry. For example, let your child put stars or stickers on a calendar or chart to note success. Keep in mind that giving lots of praise and encouragement is a great reward for your child. Avoid using candy or food as a reward.





## **When your child gets started**

Follow a schedule for potty breaks to give your child consistent training. Have your child sit on the potty chair or toilet for a few minutes at these times:

- Before going to sleep.
- First thing in the morning after waking up and then at 2-hour intervals throughout the day.
- Right after naps.
- About 15 to 30 minutes after eating.

Stay with your child and read a story together, or give your child a toy to play with while he or she sits. Allow your child to get up when he or she wants. Never force your child to keep sitting on the potty chair or toilet.

When you notice signs that your child might need to use the toilet, respond calmly but quickly. These signs might be squirming, crossing legs, holding the genital area, squatting, or grunting. Help your child become familiar with these signals, stop what he or she is doing, and go to the toilet. You can say something like, "The poop wants to come out. Let's use the potty."

To maintain consistency, bring along the potty chair or potty seat when you are away from home with your child.

Give words of approval and praise to your child for any signs of progress or success, especially for telling you when he or she has to go. Even if your child simply sits there, offer praise for trying. Remind your child that he or she can try again later.

Let your child wear loose, easy-to-remove clothing while awake.

Teach girls to wipe carefully from front to back. This helps prevent bringing germs from the rectum forward.

It is often best for boys to master peeing sitting down. After toilet training is complete, they can stand to pee if they want.

Make sure your child washes his or her hands after using the potty chair or toilet.

Your child is considered toilet trained when he or she can control bowel and bladder during the daytime by using the toilet or potty chair.

Nap and nighttime training typically take longer to achieve. Most children can stay dry at night between ages 5 and 7. In the meantime, you can use disposable training pants and mattress covers when your child sleeps.

Scheduled potty breaks is a helpful practice that can carry over into your child's school-age years.



## Accidents happen

Your child likely will have accidents. The best approach for handling accidents is to stay calm and show empathy toward your child. You might say something like, “I know you are trying to go in the potty. I know you like to be dry. We’ll keep working on it.”

**Never** yell at, criticize, shame, discipline, or spank your child after a wetting or soiling accident. There is no place for punishment in the toilet training process.

Keep in mind that sometimes small amounts of wetting or stained pants happen because your child is rushing to get back to play. You may need to gently remind your child to take the time needed.

Be prepared for accidents. Keep a change of underwear and clothing handy, especially at school or in child care. Have your child clean up and change his or her clothing as soon as possible after an accident. Offer to help your child if he or she needs it.

Give your child plenty of smiles, hugs and praise for using the potty chair or toilet. Some children wet on some days and not others. They need praise and some special fun time whenever they stay dry for a complete day.

## More Ways to Help Your Child

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Your child needs to be able to get to a bathroom at any time. Tell your child's teachers and other caregivers about your toilet-training efforts so they can continue your efforts at school or day care. Ask them to allow your child to leave the classroom at any time. Make sure your child has underwear and clothing to change into if needed.

Your child's diet is important. Encourage plenty of fluids and lots of fruits and vegetables for fiber. That helps keep your child's poop easy to pass. If a child has large, hard bowel movements, he or she may try to hold them back. This may cause your child to become constipated. Ask your child's health care provider for suggestions if you think this might be a problem for your child.

Sometimes children do not respond to the suggestions made in this information. For example, a child might refuse to sit on the toilet or will do so only if the parent insists. A child might continue to wet and soil himself or herself. This may mean your child is not ready for potty training.

If that is the case for your child, you may want to stop with reminders to use the toilet and let your child decide when to go to the bathroom. Keep encouraging your child. As he or she gains independence, you may notice signs of being ready to try potty training again.

If you have any questions or concerns about toilet training or you have tried toilet training for several months without success, talk with your child's health care provider. He or she may be able to suggest more sources of information on toilet training.

# Notes

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## BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

*This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.*

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