

How to Tell When Your Child is Ready

Lindy, two and a half, has recently begun demonstrating many of the signs of readiness for toilet training. When she senses that she's about to wet her diaper, she gets a funny look on her face and sometimes drops into a squatting position. When she's about to have a bowel movement, she runs and hides behind the couch. She's even figured out how to get her diaper off and loves to run around the house naked whenever she gets the chance. Lindy's parents agree that this seems to be the perfect time to start. Yet when they point out the potty in the bathroom to Lindy and suggest that she sit on it for a while, she just laughs and runs away. She'd rather risk an accident—and her parents' annoyance—than sit still long enough to use the bathroom.



Determining the best time to begin toilet training is not always easy—not only because readiness occurs at different ages for different children, but because your child may be ready in one area of development but not in another. A one-year-old who happily sits on her potty to look at picture books still may not be able to comprehend the potty's real purpose, while a two-year-old who knows what potties are for may refuse to use his out of a toddler's natural desire to remain in almost constant motion.

In general, most children become *physiologically* ready for toilet training at around eighteen months of age—that is, their digestive system and bladder have matured to the point where they can delay a bowel movement or urination long enough to get to a potty. But they are usually not *cognitively* ready—able to associate the need to eliminate with potty use, to remember to use it, and to resist distraction long enough to complete the process—until sometime after their second birthday. The *motor skills* needed to get to the bathroom, manage clothes, and sit still on the potty are also clearly important.

So is the *emotional* urge toward independence and self-mastery—as well as sufficient emotional maturity to relax control sufficiently to avoid constipation. *Social* readiness—an awareness of others' toilet use and a desire to imitate their behavior—is a powerful motivating force for toddlers and preschoolers. Another factor is the *verbal* ability to understand your explanations of how toilet use works and to communicate to you any confusion or uneasiness they feel.

As you can see, a range of physical and psychological developments help support the process of toilet training. While it isn't necessary to wait until you're sure that every one of these developments is in place, each step does increase the chances of toilet-training success.

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