

DDS potty training

Step 1: Make sure the child is ready

Step 2: Make sure the family is ready

Step 3: Prime the pump

Step 4: Straight into undies, a week straight in the bathroom

Step 5: gradually expand back into the world

Step 6: done and done!

Step 1: Making sure the child is ready:

- Physical behaviors
 - The child is staying dry for periods of about 2 hours
 - The child wakes up dry from naps
 - When they sit on the toilet, do they experiment with their muscles?
 - The child has a rhythm and pees/poops at semi-regular times
 - The child is aware of when they are pooping and peeing
 - The child prefers dry diapers/shows discomfort when they are soiled
 - The child is willing to sit still to master the toilet
 - The child can ride a tricycle
- Cognitive behaviors:
 - The child is curious about the body and how it works
 - The child sees a connection between their body's work and the potty
 - The child is beginning to understand what happens before, during, and after the experience of peeing or pooping
 - The child can comprehend potty books
 - The child asks to be changed
 - The child can tell you what they need
 - The child can follow simple two-step directions
 - The child knows some of their body parts by name
- Social behaviors:
 - The child is interested in following others into the bathroom
 - The child imitates trying to use the toilet
 - The child enjoys helping others
 - The child is showing some independent skills and interests

Step 2: Making sure the family is ready:

- Check the calendar, and choose a time when you can clear the next 4-8 weeks.
 - Will both parents be around?
 - Can other adults (grandparents, friends, babysitters) swoop in to support you?
 - Clear your schedule of events that will put your child in a position of stress around the toilet
- Plan for a lot of laundry
- Emotionally prepare yourself!
- Accept that it will take time for your child to learn this life skill
- Understand that it takes a lot of time and energy from all of the family to master this process

- Once we start, we won't stop.
- Prep the environment: do you want to move rugs, or cover the couch, or anything like that?

Step 3: Priming the pump

- Familiarize the child with the toilet, bathroom and anatomical terms, and the toileting process
- Read books about toilet learning with them
- Make the process of preparing (buying undies, getting a potty chair or potty seat) as empowering to them as possible!
 - Decide what you want to use: potty chair, potty seat, neither, both
 - Some folks believe smaller chairs both make the transition less frightening AND can physically help the child poop
- Stay away from "big boy"/"big girl" vocabulary.
 - It doesn't quite explain to the child the changes that are going to happen.
 - Try instead, "You're growing every day, and soon you will grow out of diapers and into the bathroom!" and/or "You're getting older every day and get to learn new things, like using the toilet!"
- Start talking about their body and its processes
 - I suggest using the actual names for both body parts and body products
 - It makes it easier for me to have a common vocabulary between all the children
 - Using "penis", "vagina", and "butt" as opposed to nicknames promotes body positivity¹
- Watch the child and get used to their rhythms
 - Learn to expect when/how often they need to pee or poop, and share that info with me!
 - Notice any cues that signal they need to go, and share these with me!

Step 4: Straight into undies and a week in the bathroom

- On day 1:
 - Go directly into undies!
 - You may choose to put them in a pullup/diaper for overnight and naps. If they are not consistently waking up dry, I will put them in a pullup/diaper for nap.
 - Give the child many, many chances for success
 - How often should they sit on the toilet? Every 15 minutes? Every 30? Every hour? At natural breaks in play?
 - The answer will vary on where your child is in their toilet readiness
 - Do not dwell on the times they are not successful AT ALL
 - Just change them and move on.
 - Don't try to turn them into moments for extended conversation or thorough teaching; just change and move on and talk about it later!
 - "Looks like you're wet! Let's change you. You can try again in dry undies!"
 - Celebrate the BEJEESUS out of successes
 - You can choose to do candy rewards or not
 - If you do choose, make sure to use them as a reward, not an incentive or a bribe.
 - A genuine smile, a hug, and the words "I am so proud of you!" can really be enough to keep a kiddo going!
 - Other ideas
 - Putting on a favorite song and dancing after
 - Calling loved ones and telling them the good news
 - Getting a child into the bathroom when they don't want to go:
 - Don't negotiate, barter, or bribe

- Make the bathroom so fun they can't stand to not be in it
 - Go in yourself, and turn on music, read their favorite book out loud, etc.
- Praise what you want, ignore what you don't want
 - When a child refuses to cooperate, praise someone who does (even if it's yourself or a stuffed animal.) You will feel stupid...until it works!
 - Don't even comment on behavior that you do not want to stay
- Focus on one skill at a time
 - Do not try to teach them to dress themselves, or wash their hands alone, or open and close the door, etc until the basic skill of holding pee or poop until they are on the toilet is learned!
- On Day 2, 3, 4,
 - Repeat
 - Repeat
 - Repeat
- On Day 5
 - Assess how the child is doing and how we are doing
 - Can the time between their trips to the bathroom lengthen?
 - Remember, we want to give them every opportunity for success!
 - Is there anything making the process more difficult for them or for us?
 - Are they ready to try car trips, foreign toilets, going alone?

Step 5: Gradually expand back into the world

- Day 6-21
 - If their success is consistent, gradually add in new elements
 - We should be seeing incremental progress, although there can be setbacks
 - Stay positive, stay focused, and don't give up!
 - After 4-8 weeks, most children will have mastered this skill
 - If it isn't working, we can meet together and find the root of the problem!

Step 6: Done and Done!

Footnotes:

1: "The Case for Teaching Kids 'Vagina,' 'Penis,' and 'Vulva'", Catherine Buni, The Atlantic
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/04/the-case-for-teaching-kids-vagina-penis-and-vulva/274969/>

Resources:

Setting Toilet Learning Up for Success, class by Think Small (www.thinksmall.org)

Toddlers and Parents, by T. Berry Brazelton

What to Expect: The Toddler Years, by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi Murkoff, and Sandee Hathaway