



Building Blocks Potty Training Survival Guide

Beth Wegerbauer

Potty training is a major milestone in a child's life—and in parents' lives, too! Before you begin the potty adventure, make sure your child seems both emotionally and physically ready. It's important to remember that every child is different and there is no textbook standard that dictates a right or wrong age by which a child should be trained.

It's also important to remember that you should not begin potty training when your child is experiencing any stress, such as a new sibling, a new preschool, a family vacation, or during an illness. It's better for the child—and your sanity—if you wait a few weeks until life settles down.

Here is your Building Blocks potty training survival guide to help you and your child successfully navigate this new adventure.

First, take 1-2 days to track how long your child stays dry, and also note if there seem to be consistent times when they go, like 30 minutes after breakfast or an afternoon bowel movement. Do a quick diaper check every 20 minutes or so. When you get a good sense of how often he or she is going, try putting them on the potty for half of that time. For example, if she goes every hour, a good rule of thumb is to put her on the potty every half-hour. Also look for signs that your child needs to go. Some kids can tell you; others will show you through facial expressions or grunting. If you hear or see these signs, ask them if they need to go.

After a few days, and whenever your child has a bowel movement, let him watch you dump it into the toilet (and explain what you are doing by saying "Poop goes in the potty") so that he can see where it is supposed to go. Also let him watch you throughout the day (again, explain what you are doing). The more he sees it, the more it will connect.

Start by using a small potty seat. It might help to get one with your child's favorite character on it. Put it on the floor in a spot where she's comfortable, like in a playroom. Let your child get used to it—let them pick it up, walk around with it, and play with it.

After 1-2 days, move it into the bathroom. It's a good idea to stash a few potty-related books in there, along with a few toys (but they should stay in there as special "potty only" toys). Sometimes it helps to use a doll—sit it on the potty, wipe it with toilet paper, and

explain everything you're doing as you do it. Another fun tip is to sing potty songs in the bathroom to get your child motivated and excited. You can find different songs on the internet or use the classic "Tinkle, Tinkle, Potty Star," sung to the tune of "Tinkle, Tinkle, Little Star." Print a song sheet and tape it to the wall; then sing, sing, sing, and don't forget the applause!

Remember to be consistent (set a timer if you have to) and, every 20-30 minutes or so, make the sign for toilet, potty, or bathroom (whatever you call it at home), and ask your child if she has to go. Walk her to the bathroom while happily saying "We're going to keep ourselves clean and dry!" and be excited about it to get her excited, too. Sit her down and explain what you want her to do. You can sit on the toilet at the same time, if that helps. If for some reason she really resists, don't force it. Back off and try again later that day or the next day.

Let your child sit for a few minutes, maybe no longer than 5 minutes; otherwise, they get distracted and forget the reason they're sitting there. Also, if they're not going to go in the first few minutes, they probably don't have to anyway. If your child doesn't have to go, let him hop off and say, "Great job! Hooray for you!" If he does go, make an even bigger fuss with lots of praise.

Then, use a very consistent routine of: wipe, pull up his pants (or let him do it), and help him wash his hands. Do this every time, whether he goes or not. Keep in mind that some kids are startled by the loud noise when the toilet flushes. If yours seems scared at first, wait until he leaves the room and then flush.

If it helps, you can give him something to drink about 10-15 minutes before the scheduled potty visit. Or, if you know he probably will have to go after lunch or dinner, try then. Frequency and consistency are key.

After a few successful days of consistently going in the potty, try underwear. If you feel a little hesitant, you can always start off by putting underwear over their diaper or training pants. After a few more days, make the switch to underwear only.

Don't forget to lavish praise on your child throughout this entire process. "I'm so proud of you!" and "What a big boy/girl you are!" are positive reinforcements. Also praise whenever he or she tells you they have to go, as that's an equally important accomplishment.

Sometimes it is helpful to use a reward system as extra encouragement. Try not to get your child too dependent on candy or treats, like M&Ms. Stickers work very well, and so do small toys from the dollar store. You can find printable rewards charts and sticker charts online (at www.pampers.com, for example) or simply make your own. Tape a piece of paper to the bathroom wall and create spaces numbered 1 through 5. After every successful potty visit, let your child pick a sticker and place it on the chart. When they

reach five stickers, let them pick a small prize, or give them a coin for their piggy bank. You can create your own treasure chest (just like the dentist's office) filled with dollar store toys, like a ball, a coloring book and crayons, flashcards, hair accessories, or even more stickers. Or, next time you hit the fast food drive-through, save the kids' meal toys for your prize bag. When kids get to pick their own special prize, it can give them a real sense of accomplishment.

Remember that potty training can be a long road and sometimes frustrating, so be patient and go at your own and your child's own pace. Accidents will happen, but don't get angry. If after a few weeks you sense that the concept is not sinking in, then back off, give both of you a little vacation from it, and start again. It is certainly not worth getting stressed out about!

It's important, too, to inform others in your child's life about what you're doing. Tell her grandparents, her teacher, and her babysitter so that they can mimic what your home routine and provide consistent support.

Potty Training Tips for Boys

Boys seem to have an easier time by sitting down to urinate first, and eventually learning how to urinate standing up. Sitting down also helps them understand that they should sit down for bowel movements, too. Sometimes if boys start by standing up, they will resist sitting down for bowel movements because they get confused.

To help them understand the concept better, turn it into a game. Throw four or five Cheerios (or even a few pieces of toilet paper— anything that's flushable) into the toilet bowl and tell your son to aim at them. Everytime he does it right, give him a big cheer! If it helps, give this game a special name that has meaning for him. For example, if dad is in the military, tell him to "sink the battleship" during "target practice."

Another fun game is the colored water trick. Add 1-2 drops of red or blue food coloring to the toilet bowl, then ask your son to turn the water orange or green. Magic!

Avoid dressing boys in clothing with lots of zippers, snaps, or buttons that might be too complicated to undo when he needs to get to the potty quickly. It might be hard for him to undo the buckles on a pair of overalls when nature calls!

Help your child pick out special underwear or training pants featuring his favorite characters, like Thomas the Train. Then tell him to keep his friend Thomas nice and dry by using the potty like a big boy.

Potty Training Tips for Girls

Most of the tips that work for boys also work for girls, like the colored water trick (although it might be harder for them to see at first). Letting your daughter choose special

underwear or training pants with princesses or Dora the Explorer might be a good incentive. Tell her to keep Sleeping Beauty dry by using the potty like a big girl.

The easiest tip for girls is to dress them in skirts or dresses during potty training. Then, when nature calls, she can just lift it up and sit right down without having to worry about zippers, snaps, or buttons.

You can also find something that your daughter really loves and work that into your training routine. For example, if she likes nail polish, find a few different colors of polish and keep them in the bathroom. Whenever she urinates in the potty, paint one of her hands with the kind of polish that washes right off. Tell her if she has a bowel movement in the potty, you will paint the other hand and also her feet with "Mommy's polish" that's more permanent.

Some experts say that girls respond better to more verbal praise, so consistently offering encouraging words like "You're such a big girl" and "I'm so proud of you for taking care of your body!" may help.

Beth Wegerbauer is co-owner of Building Blocks Learning & Child Development Center and is the mom of 4 children who are all in various stages of potty training!