

Montessori tips for toilet learning (potty training)

Successfully “potty training” your child can be an intimidating task. Luckily, the Monti Kids Learning Team has some tips and tricks to navigate the Montessori toilet learning process with minimal drama!



Is the adult ready for Montessori potty training?

Instead of “potty training,” or “toilet training” the Montessori method refers to the process as “toilet learning.” That’s because a child learns how to use a toilet through a process natural acquisition like walking or crawling, which don’t require training.

Although many parents don’t think about toilet learning until the toddler years, you can actually begin to prepare a child for success in this area beginning at birth. During diaper changes you can discuss what your child is feeling in the moment, using phrases like, “you’re wet,” or “your

diaper is full.” Exposing a child to this language will give them the tools to communicate their bodily functions when the time comes.

Preparing the Environment for Toilet Learning

You’ll want to create a prepared, child-sized toileting environment before your child is ready to start learning to use the “potty” or toilet, maybe around 13-15 months. The magic of the prepared environment lies in the fact that you’ll be ready to respond to your child’s needs.

Once you have a prepared environment, you can start doing “stand up” changes in your child’s toileting area. Stand up changes allow for more independence of a child as the child is able to collaborate more on the process, like pulling down their pants. You can set up a Montessori bar in the bathroom, or have your child hold onto the tub as you change them. After every diaper change, invite your child to sit on the toilet, so they get used to that routine.

Items for Toileting Environment

- Small “potty” seat or toilet a child can access independently – we recommend the [Baby Bjorn potty chair](#)
- A hamper for a child’s wet clothes
- A small stool or bench a child can sit on to change into dry clothes
- A little basket with a collection of several books
- A small sink or source of water where a child can wash their hands

Observe the Child

There is no magic age for toilet learning as every child is different. But, there are both physical and psychological signs of readiness to watch for.

Physical Signs of Toilet Learning Readiness

- When a child is a confident walker their sphincter muscles have formed, which means they have enough muscle control for toilet learning.

- A child may go for longer periods of time with a dry diaper, which means they are showing signs of control

Psychological Signs of Toilet Learning Readiness

- A child will learn the diaper is a foreign object and begin to try to rip it off
- You may notice your child hiding behind a door or under a table during a bowel movement as they seek privacy
- A child may show interest in what other family members are doing in the bathroom
- A child may tell you they had a bowel movement or urinated

Clothing for Toileting Independence

It's important to set your child up for success when they have an urge to go to the bathroom, and that can even come down to the type of clothes they're wearing. Overalls, big dresses and tights can get in the way. Elastic pants are great for toilet learning as your child can learn how to pull them up and down easily. Your child will first learn how to pull up and down their pants through collaborating with you, before eventually learning how to do it independently.

Committing to the Toilet Learning Process

When your child is showing the signs of toilet learning readiness, it's time to fully commit and make the switch from diapers to thick, cotton underwear.

The training underwear, also called training pants, will be absorbent so your child won't have urine running down their leg if they wet themselves, but they will still learn what it's like to feel wet. We recommend sizing up, so your child can pull on and off their underwear independently.

During this time of toilet learning, you'll want to invite your child to sit on the "potty" or toilet about every 30 to 40 minutes, beginning when

they wake up in the morning. If your child is in a group care setting, you'll want to make sure the caregiver follows your routine as closely as possible.

Some families choose to let their child still wear a diaper overnight in the early toilet learning stages. Whichever route you choose, it's important to stay consistent, as it can be a confusing time for a child. If you decide to continue with a diaper overnight, watch for a streak of three to five mornings when your child wakes up with a dry diaper. That's an opportunity to switch your child to training underwear overnight.

Plan Ahead

You can prepare for middle of the night bed-wetting incidents by layering a child's sheets. Just put a second mattress pad and fitted sheet over the first set. That way, you'll only need to remove the top layer in the middle of the night. You can also lay out a dry change of pajamas. This will lead to better nights for the entire family.

You'll also want to be ready if your child has to go – while on the go! Some tips include lining your car seat with puppy pads to make cleanup easier. You can also keep a travel potty in the back of your car. If you child has the urge, you can simply find a spot to pull over and line the potty with a diaper, which will make cleanup much easier.

Toilet Learning Struggles and Regressions

Some days it may feel like toilet learning is not clicking, while other days are successful. This is completely normal!

With our friends, we might say that our little ones are going through a regression, which may be the case, but in true Montessori style, avoid telling your child this or in the moment that they had an accident. We will continue to focus on the experience of being wet and dry. Remember, they are sensorial learners.

Say "Let's change those wet underwear," instead of "Uh-oh, you've had an accident." This way, we place emphasis on the sensation they are

experiencing rather than something they did, which can result in shame. We don't want a child to feel bad about themselves or the process, but rather build their confidence as they continue to learn.

You can also expect regressions which may occur during big life changes like the arrival of a second child or moving homes. Even simple changes in health or routine like a cold or a dropped nap can produce regressions.

Be patient and try to focus on the successes.

A Child's Reward

In the Montessori approach to toilet learning, we avoid rewarding a child with prizes for using the toilet. Otherwise, your little one will start to expect a reward each time they have a success. The reward will lie in their pride as they grow in their independence.

To learn more about toilet learning, we recommend [Sarah Moudry's book 'Toilet Awareness,'](#) and to learn more about Montessori download our [free eBook](#).