

The Children's Doctor



“My 2½ year old girl is not yet toilet trained. She tells me when her nappy needs to be changed but does not tell me when she needs to go. How do I know when she is ready for toilet training?”

Children can be toilet trained at almost any age. Some children are ready before others. Some parents are ready to take on the challenge and some are not! Do not start toilet training until you are ready. When you first start training your child, you will be “toilet timing” rather than “toilet training”. This is essentially teaching your child to respond to being taken to the toilet regularly. The toileting is initiated by the parent, not the child. The child learns to respond with weeing when placed on the toilet. Toilet timing can be undertaken in a child of almost any age. Very young infants can be taught to wee in response to a certain cue (eg a whistle) whilst being held over a tub / toilet. Although not common in our society, this practice is still common in some cultures. Toilet training will take at least 6 weeks and as long as 12 months. Be prepared for the long haul!

The best age to toilet time / toilet train a child is when they show some interest in the process and are happy to sit on the toilet or potty. Toilet training is easier if your child has developed simple language skills and is aware of when their nappy needs to be changed.

The key to toilet timing is to get the child to sit on the toilet regularly and happily. Once she will do this, the battle is half over. Take the child to sit on the toilet every 30 minutes initially then gradually stretch this out when you get some idea about how often she is weeing. Every child is different. Some wee every 30 minutes, others wee every 2 hours. Reward the child with lots of praise and fun activities if she sits happily on the toilet, even if nothing else happens. Toileting should not be stressful. It should be lots of fun. Don't ask your child if she needs to go to the toilet, tell her it's time to go to the toilet. If you are taking your child to the toilet regularly, you will eventually “catch” something in the toilet. This should be the cause of great celebration. Blow up some balloons, clap and cheer. Ring grandma and grandpa and tell them all about it! Do not get cross, scold or shout if your child doesn't seem to get it. Positive reinforcement works much better. Dismiss the accidents and rave wildly about successful toileting.