Introducing Toddlers to using the toilet can be both exciting and daunting. When are they ready? How do we do it? Here are some tips and ideas for this process.

When will they be ready?
Remember every child is different. Some children may be ready for the potty at 18 months old while others may not start the process until age 3. The importance is that this process begins when the child is ready rather than when the adult decides. Only about 22% of children are potty trained at 2.5 year old while only 88% are completed at 3.5.

Signs that they are ready:
Before beginning toilet training, be sure that your child is fully ready. If your child is not fully ready it can lead to frustration for both the parent and child. This can lead to child apprehension about using the toilet.

- Your child should have a dry diaper for at least 2 hours at a time.
- Be able to recognize when they are urinating or having a bowel movement. For example, a child knowing they are going to have a bowel movement may go to the corner of the room to do so.
- Be proficient in all skills necessary for using the toilet. Including: walking, getting on/off the toilet and pulling pants up and down.
- Follow simple instruction.
- Expresses that they are interested in using the toilet.
It is important to keep in mind that there are times when it is not in the child’s best interest to start this process. For example, if the child is going through a stressful situation, this can impact if a child is ready. Reasons to wait to start may include: upcoming/recent family move, beginning/changing child care programs, switching from crib to bed, expecting or having a new baby, during a major illness, recent death or other family crisis.

If a stressful event occurs in the middle of the toilet training process, your child may experience more accidents than usual. Give them time and patience as this would be expected.

The child takes the lead

During this process it is important that as the parent or child care provider to provide a safe and reassuring environment during this process. Accidents will happen and it is the adult’s responsibility to respond without anger. There shouldn’t be too much praise and no punishment around using the toilet. Remember the child is learning how to use the toilet and control their bodies. It is a process and will take time and practice.

Most important: It should be the child’s choice to use the toilet or a diaper/pull-up. The idea is to build confidence and independence in this process. If a child is unwilling to participate, then they are not ready.

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