**Toilet Readiness**

1. **Is my child ready for toilet training?**

   Typically a child will develop control over her bowel and bladder by 18 months. This skill is necessary for children to physically be able to use the toilet. How ready a child is emotionally to begin learning to use the potty depends on the individual child. Some children are ready at 18 months, and others are ready at 3.

   **Your child is ready to learn to use the toilet when he:**
   - Stays dry for at least 2 hours at a time, or after naps
   - Recognizes that he is urinating or having a bowel movement. For example, your child might go into another room or under the table when he has a bowel movement. This is important—if your child does not realize he is having a bowel movement, he won’t be successful at potty training.
   - Is developing physical skills that are critical to potty training—the ability to walk, to pull pants up and down, and to get on and off the potty (with some help).
   - Copies a parent’s toileting behavior.
   - Can follow simple instructions.
   - Most important, your child wants to use the potty. He may tell you that he wants to wear “big boy” underpants or learn to go potty “like Daddy does.” He may feel uncomfortable in a soiled diaper and ask to be changed or ask to use the toilet himself.

2. **When not to start potty training**

   There are some issues that can sometimes get in the way of successful potty training. For example, when children are going through a big change or several changes at once (see the following list), it might be smart to hold off on adventures in potty training. At these times, children often feel overwhelmed and sometimes lose skills they have already learned or were making progress on, such as potty training. Common family changes that are generally not good times to start training include:
   - an upcoming or recent family move
   - beginning new or changing existing child care arrangements
   - switching from crib to bed
   - when mom is close to her due date or recently had a new baby
   - a major illness, a recent death, or some other family crisis

   If your child is in the middle of potty training during a stressful time and seems to be having more accidents than usual, know that this is normal. Your child needs all
of your patience and support right now. She will return to her previous level of potty training once things have returned to normal or she has found ways to adjust and cope, with your help.

### How to help your child learn to use the toilet

There are many opinions about toilet training and many ways to toilet train. Some children are trained very early (between 12 and 24 months old). Many children are trained later (after their second or third birthdays). Although it is possible to train a younger child, it is often much harder and more stressful for the child. Toilet training early may put too much pressure on the child and parent.

Typical guidance suggests introducing toilet training when children are between 2 and 3 years old. The most important advice for toilet training is to make it a positive experience for both you and your child.

### Know when your child is ready and follow his lead

Here are some clues to look for when your child might be ready for toilet training:

- Your child can and will follow verbal directions.
- Your child shows an interest in other family members’ bathroom activities.
- Your child communicates in some way (with actions, a word, or a sign) that she has a full bladder or is about to have a bowel movement.
- Your child’s bowel movements are on a predictable schedule.

If your child is ready, ask your HealthySteps Specialist for more information and help with toilet training. If you need assistance with diapers or other items until your child is fully trained, your HealthySteps Specialist may be able to help by connecting to you to community resources.