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AGES & STAGES

Creating a Toilet Training Plan

These are the tools you will need to create your own toilet-training plan and implement it at the best time for your child. But there are certain universal rules relating to toilet training—as well as to other aspects of parenting—that will enhance your family's experience no matter what method you choose. These include:



- **Be positive.** Children learn better when they are praised for their progress rather than punished for their mistakes. Do what you can to help your child succeed as often as possible—even if it means learning gradually, one tiny step at a time. When she progresses, give her a hug, some praise, and perhaps even a small tangible reward. When she fails, tell her you're sure she'll do better next time and ask her to help you clean up.
- **Be consistent.** Create reasonable expectations according to your child's abilities, express them clearly and frequently, and expect your child to at least try to follow them every time. Keep her bathroom routine as consistent as possible, with her potty in the same place every day and the sequence of actions—including wiping and hand washing—the same every time. While she is toilet-training, praise your child for *each* success, and provide predictable, nonpunitive consequences (such as helping to clean up) for *each* failure. Make sure that your approach to toilet training is consistent with those of your child's other caregivers as well.
- **Stay involved and observe.** Very young children's needs, behaviors, and abilities change frequently and, to some extent, unpredictably. Toilet-training approaches that worked two weeks ago may not work today, and skills that your child mastered in the past may temporarily disappear in the face of new challenges. Continue to monitor your child's bathroom behavior throughout toilet training and afterward so that you can quickly identify and resolve any new problems that arise.
- **Enjoy.** Toilet training is a necessary chore, but it can also be fun at times. Don't take your child's hesitations, passing fears, or resistance too seriously. Nearly every child learns to use the toilet sooner or later, and your child will, too. Do what you can to occasionally take your eye off the long-term goal and enjoy the charming, funny moments along the way.

If you are concerned that the challenge of designing a training plan to suit your particular child may prove more difficult than following a prepackaged, one-size-fits-all program, keep in mind the advantages. It doesn't take a great deal of effort to discern whether your child is more a talker or a doer, a lover of adult-imposed routine or an independent soul who prefers to control her own actions, and in the process of figuring that out, you and your child will have gotten to know each other better. Furthermore, your child will have learned a new skill in a way that increased her confidence, her sense of security, and her self-esteem. What a wonderful process to have been a part of!

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