

The good news is that by the time the children head for the altar, they are toilet trained. However, the time in between, i.e. when they are ready to be trained at about age two and the time they set out for the altar, can be a challenge. What if one (or two) is ready to be trained before the others? When is the best time to begin or even think of training? Should they be compared to each other to encourage a slower one? The following tips have put together in an effort to assist you and your multiples in making this all-important step an enjoyable one rather than guilt-laden or down right unpleasant.

Usually parents begin to think about toilet training around their child's second birthday. Two long years of multiple diaper changes and the light is at the end of the tunnel. But don't rush it.

Before beginning, look for some positive signs that indicate that each child is ready to begin. When one or more of the following occur, then it is time to begin thinking about toilet training:

- less diapers to change during the day;
- dry through nap time;
- wet during nap time but dry for long periods during wake time;
- dry overnight.

It is recommended to have a potty per child. In this manner, each child can have possession of their own potty, may practice together or apart, can progress at their own rate and not have to challenge their sibling for a chance to sit on a potty.

- Remember to assess each child's readiness individually.
- Don't compare the children to each other or place blame regarding readiness or performance.
- Don't make a child who is ready to toilet train wait for his/her siblings to be ready.
- Take each child individually and be pleased with some one-on-one time if your children are ready to proceed at different times.

With boy/girl sets of multiples it is not unusual, for example, for the girls to be ready in advance of the boys so expect a difference in readiness time. But you can remain assured that when each child is ready and their proper muscle development has been reached, in no time at all, they will toilet train.

Some parents have good luck commencing toilet training with the bowel movements. If you notice that your toddler has his bowel movement at a set time each day, you may wish to introduce the potty just prior to that time and encourage him to try and use the potty. If it doesn't work right away, don't worry. It is not unusual for a child to have to get used to the prospect of using a potty and having the right attitude to your child's efforts will assist him in feeling comfortable about this new experience and in trying to make it a part of their daily schedule.

Some parents like to try to begin toilet training during the summer months, when clothes are few and loose fitting and the child can run around in training pants. Training pants can be helpful to use because:

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## Toilet Training Multiples

- when he sees urine and feels it running down his legs, he can better relate to what you are talking about;
- training pants are less bulky, speedier to pull down and more comfortable than a diaper;
- they are like grown-ups pants and freedom from a diaper.

When choosing a potty, make sure it is comfortable and sturdy. Falling off can be embarrassing and scary and impede the process.

You can look at free standing ones, one with a tray or one that fits directly over the toilet. If you get one that fits over the toilet, be sure to have a small stepping stool. You may wish to ask your friends which they would recommend before deciding which one to invest in. Most have a shield (sometimes removable) for use with little boys. (These can get in the way and hurt the boy when trying to get on or off the toilet. Teach them to point it downward.)

Some parents take a toy to the training session, something the child can focus on rather than on “performing” into the potty. Realize that whatever you do choose to take, may end up in the toilet. When your child is successful and does urinate or have a bowel movement in the potty, be encouraging. Use lots of praise and positive feedback. You may ask him if he wishes to flush it down. He may wish to “admire” his efforts for some time before flushing and this is quite normal.

Be prepared that your child may be startled at the sound of urine or stool falling into the potty. You may need to explain away his fears if such is the case.

Be prepared for some interference from the child(ren) who is not ready to train. He may want the toy that his sibling has or cause a disturbance to try and attract your attention and focus. Try and explain to him what his sibling is doing but if it doesn't work, you could either postpone the potty attempt for that day or remove him elsewhere. Avoid power struggles as they will only compound the situation.

Be prepared for your child to either focus on his own genitals or his siblings. This curiosity is natural. It may be a good time to refer to the proper names of your child's sex organs and get them used to hearing the proper terminology.

Try and make this time as pleasant as possible for everyone. Don't worry about your neighbour's singleton child who was trained at 20 months. That child did not have the distraction of two or three other siblings her own age and had her parents' full attention all of the time. When your children are ready, and with the proper encouragement and positive feedback, the natural will happen.

Developed by Lynda P. Haddon, Ottawa, Ontario. Adapted from “*Toilet Training.....With Love: encouraging toilet habits with singletons, twins or triplets*”, by Lucille Proulx Jodoin, 1983