

Dear Baby TALK Parents,

As your twenty-one-month old toddler approaches the last quarter of his second year, you take great pride in his many hard-won accomplishments. He is more capable and more verbal now, and you are getting a glimpse of the unique individual he is becoming. He is firmly attached to you, and probably has a pretty positive self-esteem because of all that he has achieved in so short a time.

Unfortunately, there is a challenge ahead for you and your toddler in the months to come which may put your relationship and his self-esteem to the test: **toilet training**. Because the issue of toilet training is such a difficult one for many children and parents, it can put a terrible strain on an entire family. It is sobering to note the frightening incidence of child abuse associated with toilet training accidents. Because of the risk to a growing child's self-esteem and to the parent-child relationship that toilet training often brings, it is a subject of serious concern to us at Baby TALK. For that reason, this newsletter will be entirely devoted to this topic.

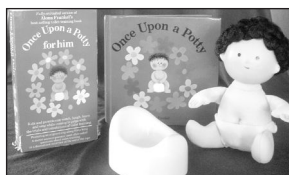
You may be thinking, "But I hadn't even considered toilet training my child yet!" **Wonderful!** By mailing it to you at twenty-one months, we are hoping to get this information to you before you have even begun the process. Statistically, most **parents** begin to train their children at about the age of two years. Most **children** are actually trained by the age of three years. Some children are trained before the age of two, and some are four or older when they are actually trained. Obviously, parents seem to be in a bigger hurry about this achievement than children.

Parents face many pressures to get their children trained early. The cost of disposable diapers and



the trouble of cloth diapers are a real burden to many families. Many preschools and day-care centers exclude children in diapers. Some fastidious parents are anxious to teach their children to be clean and dry. Grandparents may be pressuring you to train early. And there is always an unspoken sense of competition with other toddlers who are trained earlier than your own.

Obviously, you don't intend to push your child, but it is difficult to resist these pressures. But the **one cardinal rule** for knowing when the time is right to train your baby is this: **It is absolutely critical to leave it up to the child.** Very soon, your child will decide when he is ready. At that time, you and he can both experience great joy and satisfaction over this astounding feat of self-discipline.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN TO START?



In his book [Touchpoints](#), Addison-Wesley 1992, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton describes developmental steps which signal readiness for toilet training:

-  She'll be over the excitement of walking and will be ready to sit down.
-  She will be ready to understand such words and concepts as *"This is your potty seat. Mine is the big one. Someday you'll go on yours like I do on mine."*

There is a period at about two years of age when children want to imitate. A boy walks like his father, a girl like her mother. Subtly, they are identifying with the important adults around them. They want to wear your clothes. They are absorbing gestures like adults around them. Imitation can be used to capture toilet behavior.

At two years of age, most children begin to put things where they belong. They have a concept of orderliness and of where parents put things. This urge to put things away like parents do can be transferred to urine and bowel movement.

Negativism comes and goes at around two. Before that, it is always near the surface. To start when she's negative would mean failure, for sure.

All of these developmental mechanisms can be captured to help a child conform to society's demands that she be clean and dry all day and all night. Specifically, a child will begin to indicate readiness for toilet training by showing more awareness of her bodily functions. Does she grunt and pull at her diaper when she is filling it? Does she go to a specific place, or even "hide" when she is having a bowel movement? If your child shows signs that she is aware of her need to eliminate before she actually does it, you should consider two other issues: Is she in a relatively tranquil period without too much negativism? And can she follow two or more commands (Go to the kitchen, find the ball and bring it to me)? If the answer to both questions is yes, then she will have the emotional stability and necessary language and thinking skills to empower her for toilet training.

Some parents may wonder if toilet training is worth the effort, thinking that it might be better to let the child train herself. Unfortunately, your child needs you to let her know what is expected of her. Somebody's got to show her the way, even though the decision to cooperate must be her own.

HOW SHOULD I TOILET TRAIN MY TODDLER?

There is no one "right" method for teaching toilet training, but there is a "right" attitude: one of patience, gentleness, acceptance and respect for each child's right to make decisions regarding his own body. It is a mistake for parents to take "ownership" of the process. It is your child's job to learn to control his bladder and bowels. And when your child has accidents (as he most certainly will), it is your job to help him forgive himself and go on.

If you are looking for a "method" for training, here is the one that Dr. Brazelton advises to the families in his practice:

- First**, give him his own potty chair. It should be his to drag around to learn with.
- Second**, after a week or so, take him to sit on his potty chair in his clothes while you sit on yours. Read to him or give him a cookie to get him to sit there momentarily. This is just to get in the routine of sitting on the chair.
- Third**, the next week, ask him if it's all right to take off his diaper while he sits on the chair once a day. Reiterate, *"This is what Mommy (or Daddy or whoever) does every day. We go to the potty when we're big like you!"*
- Fourth**, the third week, take him to the potty with his dirty diaper to undo it and then drop it in. Say, *"Someday, this is where you will go to do your b.m. This is what Mommy and Daddy do everyday. This is your potty and this is mine."* Don't flush it away in your toilet while he watches. Some children worry about where it goes!



Fifth, the next step is at the toddler's discretion. If he resists, forget it for a while. If he is still interested, you can offer to take off his clothes and let him run around with a bare bottom. Offer to put his potty where he is playing. He can go to it himself if he wants to. Offer to remind him every hour to try to go. He will very likely be able to produce something in one of his times on the potty. Leave it there a while for him to admire. Congratulate him, but don't overdo it. Remember, this is his achievement, not yours.

Sixth, if he is really ready, you can leave his pants off for longer and longer periods. If he has an accident on the floor or begins to resist, go back to diapers without making it seem a punishment. Say as little as possible about it. When he is ready to try again, let him try. You are counting on his desire to be "big."

Seventh, in learning to urinate in the toilet, a boy should start out sitting down. Standing and "spraying" is too much fun. When he is trained, an older male (like Dad) can show him how to stand and urinate.

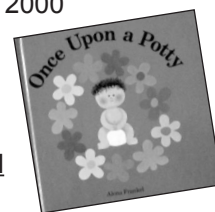
Eighth, night training shouldn't begin until he's dry after his nap and lets you know that he wants to stay dry at night. Wait until he's really ready. Most children aren't able to stay dry at night until the age of three or even four or five.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Toilet training is one more step to helping your child grow toward independence. A helpful tool for your task is the book Toilet Training: The Brazelton Way by T. Berry Brazelton and Joshua Sparrow, DaCapo Press 2004.

When you suspect that your child is showing an interest in beginning toilet training, you may enjoy reading books together on the subject. Your library will probably contain a number of good picture books on the subject. Here are some of our favorites:

- You Can Go to the Potty
- M. William Sears, M.D.,
- Little Brown 2002
- Caillou - Potty Time
- Joceline Sanschagrin,
- Editions Chouette 2000
- Everyone Poops.
- Taro Gomi, Kane/Miller 1993
- Too Big for Diapers
- John E. Barrett, Random House 2000
- The Potty Book - for Boys (Girls)
- Alyssa Satin, Capucilli, Barrons 2000
- My Big Boy Potty (Girl)
- Joanna Cole,
- Harper Collins 2000
- Once Upon a Potty - Boy or Girl
- Harper Festival 1999
- Zoo Poo: A First Toilet Training Book
- Richard Morgan,
- Barrons Juveniles 2004



BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK