

Chapter 1

Launching the Potty- Training Adventure

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You've toted that barge (diaper bag) and lifted that bale (evil poop) long enough! After changing thousands of diapers, you probably have major issues relating to small-fry output. Still, the fact remains that you can't send your child away to potty-training boot camp and get her back when all the work's done. What you can do, though, is pull off a truly bang-up job of helping her fine-tune her potty skills — without ever feeling as if you've moved into some kind of frightening, feces-filled parallel universe.

The problem is that when you start potty training, you throw open the door to confusing advice if you puzzle out loud about toddler training; and then you're knocked over by a rapid-fire barrage of answers: "I stuck my kid on the washing machine till she got the idea." "I waited to start training until my kids were real old!" "When your kid hands you a dirty diaper, she's ready." Ask and you will be given at least fifty million ideas on how to potty train. But, use the *Potty Training For Dummies* approach, and you won't have to ponder which tales are right and which ones are wrong. You'll have the snug comfort of a bona fide plan that works.

With *Potty Training For Dummies*, you'll enchant your child by tucking brass-tacks skills into a package wrapped with pretty bows (games) and cute paper (rewards). As chief dance-master, you will provide oodles of patience, soft-voiced tips, and readiness for quirky behaviors.

No matter what you encounter, you're good with it. Have no doubt — you can teach your child how to use the potty with ease, as long as you wait until your wee one shows she's geared up for the challenge.

Starting Potty-Mambo Dance Class

Imagine that you're going to take a mambo class, but you've never even done a square-dance do-si-do, a tango swoop, or a tap dance shuffle-ball-change combination. What would you need to start out? Who would you bring along for help and comfort? You'd want warm supporters, and you'd want the right stuff. Don't ask me to do a cha-cha with no castanets, please! (For those of you that don't know, castanets are the little wooden cymbals you click together with your fingers in beat to the music!)

Promising plenty of help

Your toddler will definitely need some cool people on her team for moral support — the same ones who totally flipped out when she took her first steps.

On her first day out, let your child know she's going to have lots of supporters cheering her on — to help her feel warm-and-fuzzy while she's learning this brand-new potty dance. Mommy. Daddy. Teacher-at-day-care Miss Allison. Nana. Gran and Gramps. Aunt Christina. And big sister, Jenny.

Tell your tot that you'll be her main teacher in the Potty Mambo, but she'll be the star. Early on — before you've even pinpointed the time for Potty-Training Weekend, start some pre-potty-training pep talks. Talk up how much everyone will applaud her success when she's a full-fledged potty user.

Providing the right stuff

Get ready by buying the right stuff — from potty chair to hotsy-totsy videos to pants that are easy to pull up and down. See Chapter 3 for suggestions.

Your toddler will like the excitement of knowing she's equipped for this new challenge. And the pleasure of those new things will carry her past any nagging fears that may be flitting by.

A well-dressed potty trainee will need both training-pant pullups and big-kid underwear (to look forward to). You have lots of options here — so many, in fact, that you may need help in sorting what's what and what works best in certain circumstances. (See info on training-pant options in Chapter 3.)

Keeping an Eye Out for Your Window of Opportunity

The biggest key to success in potty training is: starting it at the right time! Get a good feel for when your child is really ready — both her mind and body are in gear — and you're halfway home.

Do it too soon, and you may end up staring at each other like a couple of zombies. If she's unready, she'll potty-sit in a trance just because she knows you want her to. As long as she's hanging out in that spot, you can't make her do stupid stuff like put up toys or go to bed. While she's working on potty deeds, she's queen-for-the-half-hour.

So work hard to leap on readiness signs (we put a list of them on the Cheat Sheet at the front of the book), and soon you'll be entering that twilight zone of tinkle talk, toilet-paper clogs, and mega-emphasis on making safe deposits in a small innocent bowl that's ready-and-waiting to be called to the front line for action.

Noting her approach to the dance floor

For potty training to work, your child must be at the point when bowel and bladder control are within her reach. Otherwise, if her body refuses to help, she'll only get frustrated. (Talk about feeling like a klutz with two left feet!)

So keep your eyes peeled for signs that your child is now peeing and pooping on a more regular schedule — less often, bigger amounts. Other things that signal all-clear-ahead are when she's acting like a neat freak and complains of wet/dirty pants. See Chapter 4 or the Cheat Sheet for these signs. If you're training a child with disabilities, read both Chapter 4 and Chapter 17 to check for potty-training startup signs.



No matter what the age, a child who's unfazed when she pees and poops is not going to be ready to cooperate with potty training or understand why it's necessary.

Knowing when the timing's cool

Try some high-drama thinking to conjure up what your tiny tot could be feeling right now. So far, in her two short years, she has found the world a whirlwind of color and smell and texture and sound. And you've been her right-hand guide in sorting through the maze of wonders.

But this time she's trying to learn something that goes against the grain of what she has done naturally since emerging into the world. Dumping

her bodily goods in her diapers was so easy, so stress-free, and from what she can tell, it sounds like you're asking her to crank up her brain and body to some strange new sophistication level that doesn't yet make a lick of sense.

Be wise and avoid high-stress periods for your startup of potty training. Also, look for a time when she has passed the "terrible twos" and is moving on to a sweeter, gentler stage. (See Chapter 5 for timing tips.)

Giving the Potty Mambo a Good Beat

The caregiver or parent who's potty training for the first time can see clearly that this process can go bad in fifty-jillion ways. Why? Because completing potty deeds takes a whole bunch of skills: Your toddler must

- ✓ Be able to control her impulses
- ✓ Have motor skills that are really cooking
- ✓ Like the idea of being a tiny bit self-propelled
- ✓ "See me hold back my pee or poop till I reach the potty. See me walk, tug down clothes, wipe myself, pull up clothes, flush the toilet. See me even want to do these things alone." And, besides self-control, walking, undressing, and climbing onto the potty, she may need to run the hundred-yard dash in order to get to the bathroom on time!

Believe us, from your child's point of view, all of this probably seems freaky-scary, which is why you must pretty-up the whole dance with a friendly approach.

You, you world-wise pottyologist, must entice this sweet-and-sassy kiddo by chatting up the time set aside for her to learn the Potty Mambo. To engage your child fully, you'll stage a special launch weekend, when you declare an embargo on distractions and start writing a first-draft diaper-eulogy. The Potty Monologues are under way. Get her swaying to the beat!

Prepping for the real training time — Potty-Training Weekend — calls for some subtle and warm persuasion. (See Chapter 6 for more.)

Kids can really get moving when you get them in the right mood — so take time to flaunt the role models ("See your big sister Monique — how cool is that? She uses the potty — but I can remember years ago when she was in diapers and then had to learn to use the potty herself.") Notice that you're not saying, "Why can't you be more like her?" You're just pointing out that Monique uses the toilet in a big-person way.



You're in a partnership here, assisting your child in achieving success as a natural offshoot of the adventure. Your trainee has to forge ahead, but you can certainly give a lot of hands-on guidance.

As you nudge your little pip toward the weekend of her magical coup, help get her jazzed about what's coming up. Let her sit clothed on her potty chair and bask in the newness of her spiffy seat. Coach her on buzzwords that she'll use to dazzle when she Potty-Mambos.

Make the most of psych-up talks. You're letting bathroom words become commonplace to her — in a “by the way you'll soon be doing this” kind of way. Encourage her anticipation — this will be a special time with you, one of her favorite people. But don't create dread by outlining great expectations for Potty-Training Weekend. (See Chapter 6 on prepping.)

If she looks worried and says, “no go potty,” that means one thing: She's afraid that when the time comes, she'll fail to deliver what you want. So reassure, reassure, reassure. “Whatever you do, Potty-Training Weekend will be fine — you're a beginner. You're just learning, little gal. We'll play and sing and have fun together. You'll learn how to use the potty, but if you have a little trouble remembering, no problem!” High-five — let her know that it's a joint enterprise, and you're her number-one supporter.

Making Sure Everyone Enjoys the Big Dance

Ah, the chaperone. That's you — the one with the power to make Potty-Training Weekend fun — or a big fat washout. So, go into it with your sense of humor tucked under one arm and a passel of patience under the other. Only good things can happen because the main outcome you're shooting for is this: Both of you should walk away with good feelings and memories of toddler/grown-up bonding at its best. You'll make sure that little potty trainee feels like she did something really good.

Hey, wait a minute, you say. She didn't pee or poop in the potty a single time! No matter. You still heap praise on her for the big T — Trying. In potty training, effort is good — very good — and gets rewarded. Enough little efforts, and she'll actually be using the potty on a regular basis. (See Chapter 7.)

Toting an emergency kit

Going into Potty-Training Weekend, you're excited. Plus, you're armed with an “emergency kit,” so you're ready for accidents, surprises, and attitudes.



Just like getting ready for her first dance recital, do what you can to make things go smoothly. The more groundwork you lay, the better her potty training will go.

Make available all the props and supplies your child will need for potty training. (Get your child really into the idea by letting her be your shopping-trip sidekick.) See Chapter 3 for more ideas.

To be prepared, gather startup info on training problems, smart responses to relapses, guidelines on special-needs children, and savvy ways to handle sparring with a spouse or relative who may have a different philosophy on potty training. (See Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17.)

Warming her up for the big time

As Potty-Training Weekend starts, you'll go through a whole lot of shenanigans to get your child cooking: You'll help her teach her doll to use the potty chair for peeing. You'll take your toddler to her potty chair every hour (and after meals) all Potty-Training Weekend (except during the night). Together, you'll set up an exciting Success Chart. And, finally, you'll switch her to training pants after a few successes during the weekend. (See Chapter 7 for details on dancing the Potty Mambo.)

Then, when the weekend is over, you'll help her mesh the new skills into the framework of everyday life: You'll give any outside caregivers the poop on her potty program. And, you'll spend time every day reinforcing her brand-new tricks.

Knowing Your Place as Mentor

You have to stifle all great expectations during potty days. Simply stay on message: Be calm and patient. Laugh often. Smile a lot.

Be prepared for taking your child's act on the road. You have to get ready for outings. And, ensure that outside caregivers are following your lead.

You can keep your child in step by staying enthusiastic about her progress, not overreacting to odd behavior, and handling speed bumps with ultimate cool.

Biting your tongue

During potty-training days, you may learn a lot about yourself. Maybe you never knew you were such a control freak. Or maybe you suddenly turned into one of the neatness police. All kinds of "I told you so" things seem to fly to your lips, uninvited.

So you must do absolutely anything (short of gagging yourself) to keep from nagging your little chum, who's probably chugging along about as ably as a two-year-old can be expected to. This just could be the perfect time to learn how to tie a knot in a cherry stem with the end of your tongue. (You know you've always wanted to do that.)

Covering the A B Cs of car trips

Help your child feel safe and secure by making sure she's got all sorts of situations covered.

Staying potty trained at home is one thing — out in a spooky bathroom at a sports arena is something entirely different. (See tips in Chapter 9.)

Keeping her in step

Do three things to keep your child in step while she's doing the Potty Mambo. Provide loads of theatrical enthusiasm. Use lots of motivating lines. And troubleshoot when funky snags show up — things like pee accidents, mondo-modesty, or freak-show moments (pooping in her toy box, streaking when friends visit, and so on). See Chapters 8 and 11 for more.

Benefiting from Others' Cool Moves

Don't get the feeling you're out there on the stage all by yourself — far from it. Lots of people like to get in on promoting Potty Mambo moves.

Just figure they're out to help. Invite them inside the loop. From doctors and Web sites, to ex-mates and relatives, you'll find support everywhere you turn. (If you're divorced, see the tips in Chapter 12 for snaring good potty-training results when your child goes from dad's house to mom's house.)

Becoming the Grand Poopbah of Potty Mambo (Trouble-Buster Supreme)

Well, no one ever learned anything valuable without a few mistakes, right? And, potty training's no different. Just when you think, "Wow, she's got it!" something happens that rewrites the entire script.

So, you're back to square one — older, more tired, but definitely not down and out. You're a fountain of ideas, a trouble-buster supreme. And while you're establishing yourself as the Grand Poopbah of the Potty Mambo, your twisting trail may have enough gnarly detours to hone the heart of a champion.

Watching the Backslider Twist

Your little tornado toddler gives a whole new meaning to the word "accidents." Frankly, your mind is blown. What the heck is she up to?

Truth is, she's probably not bummed by you or the potty. Many things can cause kids to lapse into backsliding, but thumbing her nose at you usually isn't one of them.

Nevertheless, these are indeed times that try men and women's souls — so brief yourself on how to do what during side trips to strange places in the Potty Zone. See Chapter 13 for more.

Wetting in the morning, wetting in the evening, wetting at suppertime

Daytime accidents. Nighttime bed-wetting. If you want to be the Grand Poopbah of the Potty Mambo, you need to do a real fancy-pants job of problem solving. The wet-pants department, as you may have guessed, is especially perplexing.

Here you may be dealing with a child who bed-wets long-term — and can't seem to shake it — or the kiddo who day-wets after being potty trained. For tips on when to see a doctor, read Chapter 14.

Teaching a balker a brand-new dance

If you like a challenge, you got it in a kid who just won't dance. The key to leaping past balking is figuring out what's going on. When you have some idea of your child's problem — what's making her dig in and declare war on the potty — you can take any one of several approaches. You'll find that the ideas we recommend in Chapter 15 cut to the chase and usually get quick results.

Knowing what to do about soil, soil, toil, and trouble

Some children just aren't good at the Potty Mambo. So, they have trouble with stool-soiling their pants even beyond toddler years.

Often, the solution's as simple as getting rid of your child's constipation. Other times, the kid needs tons of handholding and special handling because she has gotten attached to her "product" and has become possessive and a bit weird about holding onto it.

Jumpstarting a child who's soiling can be hard at times, but Chapter 16 is packed with great ideas for resolving this mysterious detour.

Giving Special Attention to Special Children (with Disabilities)

Kids with disabilities need extra-special treatment when they're learning the Potty Mambo. It's not that they lack rhythm or can't be potty trained; most children with disabilities and chronic diseases absolutely can learn to use the toilet. But they need plenty of consistency, potty opportunities, and patience. Plus, you'll need to clown around a bit — put on your jazz shoes and entertain like a mad person. Sing a happy tune or two — you'll get her attention.

All kids think potty training's a little bit hard, and children who have trouble just moving around — or have difficulty with the mind-body connection — are going to require lots of TLC to get the process clicked in place. See Chapter 17 for more on this.

Polishing off a Super-Slick Potty Babe

Bottom line: Listen up when your child clues you in as to what she needs from you. And respond with loving support and patience and a fantastic sense of humor. Do those things, and you're guaranteed a good outcome: *Potty Training For Dummies* will work for your child — and you'll avoid that disconnect that you worried about.

Basically, we just don't believe in drudgery when it comes to parenting, so you'll discover lots of fun ways to get through potty training's rough spots as you flip through the pages of this book. Take note of the parts that fit your situation — and use *Potty Training For Dummies* to make your days of teaching the Potty Mambo full of joy and whimsy.

Then when you're all finished and your child is showing off her Potty-Mambo medal and her frilly pants, give yourself a pat on the back for doing this thing right. You've made it through the potty adventures, and you've come out the other side with a smile on your face.

And, your child still likes you. In fact, she thinks you're kind of cool.

Potty-trained tykes rule!

