

Keep Potty Training Stress-Free! PART TWO

Stress-Free Potty Training, A Commonsense Guide to Finding the Right Approach for Your Child (AMACOM Books) by pediatric neuropsychologist Dr. Pete Stavinoha, offers thoughtful planning tips, effective communication techniques and specific clues to help parents tailor their training to their individual child and, thus, avoid stress during this major life change. He wants parents to know that planning and patience are the keys to unlock the bathroom door.

“Successful potty-training starts with understanding a child’s individual personality,” explains Dr. Stavinoha.

Stress-Free Potty Training identifies five distinct personality types – the Sensory-Oriented Child, the Internalizing Child, the Goal-Directed Child, the Strong-Willed Child and the Impulsive Child - and offers practical tips for training each of those kids differently. The book starts with a quiz to help parents identify which category their child falls.

- Goal oriented child: generally logical, reasonable, and easy to parent. When you suggest trying something new to them, they are generally willing. In terms of potty training, these are children that may benefit a great deal from modeling of toileting behavior, and they may also respond favorably to understanding the "rewards" of independent toileting (e.g., getting to wear big boy or big girl underwear, being more like mom or dad or older sibling).
- Sensitive child: have a tendency to overreact to otherwise normal sensory stimuli. For example, these are children that have significant reactions to loud noises like a vacuum cleaner, and often complain of being incessantly bothered by the tags in their clothes. In terms of toilet training, they may overreact to being splashed with water, a too hot or too cold seat, the smell, etc... this new world may seem over frightening and random.
- Internalizing child: tends to be very cautious and express a number of fears. They have a tendency to withdraw from new things, and they are very cautious in new situations. These children may continue to utilize a diaper long after they otherwise know that they have to use the bathroom, simply because it is what is familiar to them, and what is familiar is also comfortable.
- Impulsive child: the one who climbs all of the furniture and knows no fear, but cannot stand to be bored. These kids have trouble learning to sense the signs of impending elimination, and it’s difficult to keep them on the potty long enough to show any results.
- Strong-willed child: needs to be in control, is intense and somewhat negative in nature. In terms of toilet training, these children may toilet train very easily if it is of their choice. However, most of the time this is not the case and they can be some of the most difficult children to train.

“Once you learn how to work with your child’s personality, potty training, and really parenting your child throughout his life, will make more sense,” says Dr. Stavinoha. “The most important thing for parents to remember is that every child will potty train when he or she is ready, and that means physically, cognitively and emotionally.”

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While every child potty trains at a different age, and in different ways, the author of *Stress-Free Potty Training, A Commonsense Guide to Finding the Right Approach for Your Child* (AMACOM Books), pediatric neuropsychologist Dr. Pete Stavinoha, says there are some “universal strategies” you can use with every child.

Stavinoha, of Children’s Medical Center Dallas, suggests “nakedtime” as a great way to begin. Basically, the idea is that you allow your children to simply be naked, but in fairly close proximity to a bathroom or potty chair, for periods of time, during which (we hope) they will need to go. “To your child, it’s tons of fun, and perhaps something s/he may not have been able to do before. To you, it’s a fantastic teaching tool,” explains Stavinoha.

- Nakedtime is non-threatening and passive; when you start you don’t even have to mention that it has anything to do with going potty.
- With no clothes on, kids have, for the first time, a clear view of the physical mechanics of urination and defecation.
- You can provide immediate explanations of what’s happening; breaking down the process into simple, specific behaviors your child can learn one at a time.

If your child hasn’t yet tried to sit on the toilet, offering the option before you start actual training would be good. He or she can sit in clothes or naked, whatever is preferred, but be sure to allow time to sit without the expectation of anything additional at first. Do not unexpectedly put them on the toilet while they are already dealing with the stress of their first accident. [Don’t ever force a child to sit on the toilet, or you’ll set yourself up for a major power struggle. If your child outright refuses to even sit, that’s a sign they are not ready to train, so back off and try again in a few weeks.]

Regardless of your training technique, it may take a number of accidents before your child understands that the idea is to get their pee, even just some of it, into the potty. If you expect that from the outset, you’ll be able to react calmly when the accidents happen.

That calm reaction is the most important thing you can do for your child during this process, says Stavinoha. “Keeping the toilet-training process stress-free is important both to allow your child the best learning environment, and for yourselves. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more child abuse occurs during potty training than any other developmental step.”

He cautions, “Stressed-out parents are more likely to make poor choices, so I advise parents to start training without any expectations for a quick success, anticipate lots of accidents, and to remember that they don’t control the situation, their child does.”

Even the slightest success is something upon which to build. Praise your son or daughter for running really fast to the bathroom, even if they didn’t quite make it in time. Give him a high-five for getting even a few drops of their pee in the potty. Wiping, flushing and washing her hands are also skills to applaud. Concentrate on helping them recognize their body’s signals and to react quickly to those signals.

Parents can continue to keep their child in diapers until they feel like they’re making some headway – making it to the toilet in time regularly. Once you introduce underwear, the focus of training will become more about holding it for longer periods of time and trying to go even when they may not feel like it.

Tips by Gender – from Stress-Free Potty Training

BOYS:

- Start off teaching them to pee sitting down, which will allow you to focus on lessons of recognizing the signs they have to go, making it to the toilet on time, and the mechanics of physically going.
- Make sure they are tall enough to be able to pee standing up (i.e. when they stand at the toilet, their penis needs to be able to reach over the lip of the toilet enough for them to be able to point it down into the potty) otherwise you’ll have a regular spray of urine to clean up after each pee. If they can’t reach, but want to learn to go like Daddy, keep a small step stool next to the toilet or use a potty-chair for the time-being.
- Toss some Cheerios into the toilet to teach them to aim properly.
- If using a small mattress pad to guard against leaks, place it a little higher on the bed for a boy.

GIRLS:

- Spraying urine can be an issue for girls, as well, if they are seated far back on the potty and are propping their legs far apart to steady themselves. Teach them to keep their legs together straight out over the potty to the lip of the seat, if this is a problem.
- Dresses can make for easy access and will save time because they won’t have to stop to pull down their pants, however they can trip up your daughter as she climbs onto the toilet. Dresses can also drag into the toilet water or get in the way of their stream of urine so teach your little girl to tuck it up into the neck of the dress to keep it out of the way.

- Girls are particularly susceptible to urinary tract infections at this age, so stop using soap or bubbles in the bath water and work very hard to teach them to wipe poop cleanly, from front to back. Alternatively, you can teach her to wipe her pee-pee first and then get a second piece of toilet paper to wipe the poop in a completely separate action.

Stress-Free Potty Training, A Commonsense Guide to Finding the Right Approach for Your Child (AMACOM Books) by Peter L. Stavinoha, Ph.D., and Sara Au, is available on Amazon.com and in bookstores. Stavinoha is a dad and clinical pediatric neuropsychologist at Children’s Medical Center of Dallas. Au is a mother and a journalist specializing in parenting and health issues. In addition to the book, the pair co-host a podcast titled, “The Real Parenting Show With Dr. Pete & Sara.” You can find out more and read an excerpt from *Stress-Free Potty Training* here: <http://bit.ly/5bWlNe>.