PROUD MOMENTS ABA

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Parent's Guide to Toilet Training

SUPPORT, STRATEGIES, AND SUCCESS
FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD



REAL SUPPORT | PRACTICAL STRATEGIES | POSITIVE PROGRESS | PROUD MOMENTS

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PARENT'S GUIDE TO TOILET TRAINING

Let's Get This Potty Started!

You are not alone in this.

Know that you are a STAR...



Hi friends,

It's toilet training time.

Maybe this is your first attempt,
or maybe you're trying again.
Either way—you're in the right place.

THIS GUIDE IS YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

- Real experiences
- Real expectations
- Real encouragement

This comes from my own journey, along with the shared experiences of other families.

These are the things we wish someone had told us beforehand.

My goal is simple: help you feel informed, confident, prepared, and supported as you move through this process.

We've been there—
and we're here with you.

Let's Be Honest.....

You've got this, we're here to help.

There will be accidents.

There may be frustration.

You might get peed on. Your furniture might get peed on.
You may clean up more poop than feels humanly reasonable.
You may feel like you live in the bathroom.

None of that means you're doing anything wrong.

Toileting is like every other behavior ♡

We make it more complex than it needs to be

It is a basic biological function that we teach someone to perform in a particular way

Appropriate behavior is reinforced

Energy, Effort, and Reality

Toilet training is hard. Most parents feel that way, and it helps to hear it out loud.

This skill requires:

- Body awareness
- Communication
- Motor coordination
- Emotional regulation

It takes energy. It takes commitment.

If it were easy, none of that would be required.

But it is worth it. ♡

You're doing better than you think.

Is My Child Ready?

Look for these signs:



- Stays dry for 1–2 hours



- Shows awareness of being wet or soiled



- Can follow simple instructions



- Tolerates sitting on the toilet



- Has somewhat predictable bowel patterns



This helps prevent starting too early

(one of the most common reasons toilet training doesn't work)

There is no rush, but there is a right time.

Preparation:
Set Yourself Up for Success

Before you begin, prepare your environment:

1 ENVIRONMENT SETUP

- Bring reinforcers into the bathroom
- Reduce visual clutter—keep it calm and predictable
- Use a potty seat and/or step stool for stability
- Have a waterproof mat for easier cleanup
- Keep extra underwear accessible

2 REINFORCERS

- Use highly preferred rewards
- Keep them ONLY for toileting
- Make sure you have plenty ready

3 SENSORY SUPPORTS

- Foot support for stability
- Warm seat if needed
- Control flushing sound
- Adjust lighting if needed

4 CAREGIVER ALIGNMENT

Consistency across caregivers matters.

- Same language
- Same schedule
- Same reinforcement



Setting up your environment first makes everything easier.

Know Your Starting Point

Before you begin, take a moment to observe:

Observe your child's current abilities.
Use this to understand what they can do right now.

Can Do Independently

Tasks your child can complete on their own without any help.

Can Do With Help

Tasks your child can complete when given support, prompts, or assistance.

Not Yet Able To Do

Tasks your child cannot complete yet, even with support.

This helps you:

- Set realistic expectations
- Know where to support
- Avoid frustration (for both of you)

This step guides everything that comes next.



Start where your child is—
not where you hope they'll be.

Observe & List: Bathroom Steps

Watch your child in the bathroom complete these steps. Write down what they can do without help, with help, or not at all. This will give you an idea of steps you may want to practice separately before the toilet training process begins.

Step:	What they can do: (Circle one)			Notes: (Any details that may help)
1 Go into bathroom	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
2 Turn on lights	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
3 Unbutton/unzipper pants	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
4 Pull pants down to floor	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
5 Pull down underwear	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
6 Sit down on toilet	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
7 Void (urinate/bowel movement)	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
8 Wipe	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
9 Stand up	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
10 Pull up underwear	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
11 Pull up pants	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
12 Zipper or button pants	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
13 Flush toilet	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
14 Turn water on	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
15 Wash hands	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
16 Turn water off	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
17 Dry hands	Without Help	With Help	Not At All	
★ Other: _____				

Understanding where your child is now helps you plan what to teach next!

What to Expect: The Process

Toilet training happens in 3 main steps:

1

Step 1:

Move into your bathroom. Hang around the bathroom and practice going as often as possible.



2

Step 2:

Take your child to the bathroom on a schedule.



3

Step 3:

Gradually increase the interval and teach your child to initiate.



This is a process—not a quick fix.

Every child learns at their own pace.



Progress happens step by step.

Step 1: Intensive Practice



This is where most of the learning happens.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Stay close to the bathroom
- Provide frequent opportunities
- Watch carefully for signs

KEY ACTION:

If urination begins → move quickly to the toilet.

WHAT THIS PHASE MAY LOOK LIKE

- Spending most of the day near or in the bathroom
- Bringing toys, books, and activities into the space
- Increasing fluid intake
- Using clothing that helps you detect accidents quickly



KEY ACTIONS

- Move at the FIRST sign—not after
- Prompt as needed (verbal, physical, gestural)
- Reinforce immediately after success
- Track every urination

REINFORCEMENT

- Use highly preferred rewards
- Reward immediately
- Only reward success



WHAT DAY 1 MIGHT LOOK LIKE



Remove diapers



Increase fluids



Stay near the bathroom



Watch closely



Reinforce immediately

This phase is intense—but it builds the foundation.



Step 2: Schedule Training

Use your data to guide the plan.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

- Identify patterns from your data
- Take your child to the bathroom before expected times
- Slightly underestimate intervals to increase success



IMPORTANT:

Remove diapers and pull-ups during the day.

- They create mixed expectations.
- Consistency matters more than convenience.



TEACH COMMUNICATION

Every trip should include communication:

- Words
- Signs
- Pictures (PECs, visuals)

AS PROGRESS BUILDS

- Gradually increase time between bathroom trips
- Begin supporting your child to initiate



END GOAL



Eventually, your child will begin to go independently.

Consistency creates success.

Step 3: Independence

This is where independence begins to grow.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

- Communication
- Initiation
- Fading prompts

FADING PROMPTS

- Start with the most support (even physical if needed)
- Pair with simple, consistent language
- Fade prompts as quickly as possible



Prompt → Practice → Fade

TRACKING PROGRESS

Track daily:

- Attempts
- Successes
- Accidents
- Patterns



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Increasing dry intervals
- More independent trips
- Patterns before accidents

DATA GUIDES YOUR DECISIONS.



Over time, your child will begin to go on their own.

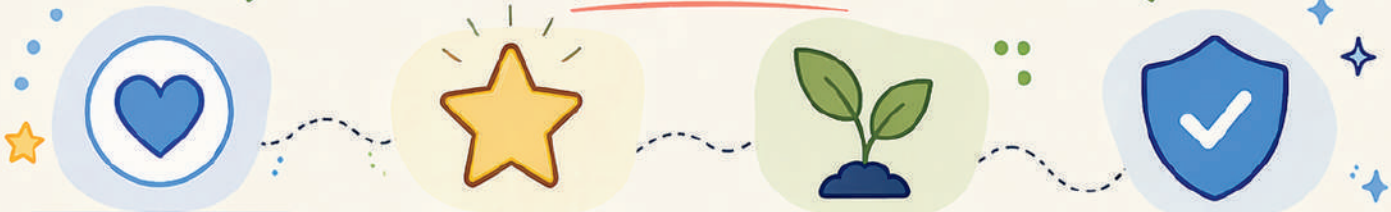
Independence is built step by step.

What NOT to Do

Avoid these common mistakes.

- ✗ Punishment for accidents
- ✗ Delayed reinforcement
- ✗ Switching strategies too quickly
- ✗ Going back to pull-ups during the day

These can slow progress and create confusion.



These can slow progress and create confusion.

Consistency matters more than perfection.

Mistakes happen—just get back on track.

Stay consistent, and progress will follow.

Consistency is the key to independence.

Out & About: Toileting in Public

Once things are going well at home, it's time to expand.

1 START SMALL

- Begin with short trips.
- Choose familiar, low-pressure locations.
- Plan outings around your child's schedule.

2 BE PREPARED

- Bring reinforcers
- Pack extra clothes
- Bring wipes and a plastic bag
- Know where bathrooms are ahead of time

3 KEEP IT CONSISTENT

- Use the same language
- Follow the same routine
- Reinforce the same way

NEW ENVIRONMENTS MAY TEMPORARILY REDUCE SUCCESS.

That's normal—stay consistent.



4 BUILD GRADUALLY

- Increase outing length over time
- Try new locations slowly
- Expect some setbacks

Progress at home doesn't disappear—it just needs practice everywhere.

Confidence grows with practice in new places.

When Things Aren't Working

If progress stalls, take a step back and adjust.

CHECK THESE FIRST

- Are you being consistent?
- Are reinforcers strong enough?
- Are you moving quickly enough at the first sign?
- Are you tracking patterns?

COMMON REASONS FOR STALLING

- Starting too early
- Inconsistent implementation
- Reinforcement isn't motivating enough
- Waiting too long to prompt

WHAT TO DO

- Go back to the last successful step
- Increase reinforcement value
- Tighten your consistency
- Revisit your data

Progress isn't always linear.



Setbacks don't mean failure— *they're part of learning.*

Adjust the plan—not your expectations.

Define Success on Your Terms

My son was on a tight schedule for over a year.
It was exhausting—but it worked for us.

We would have felt defeated if we expected fast results.



Instead:

He was progressing	He felt successful	That was enough at the time

Define success based on your child—
not a timeline.



Progress doesn't have to be *fast to be meaningful.*

Accidents: What They Really Mean

Not all accidents mean the same thing.

SOMETIMES... THEY'RE JUST ACCIDENTS

These are part of the process.

- Illness
- Fatigue
- Skill still developing

OTHER TIMES... MAYBE NOT

Sometimes, there's more going on.

1 A child peeing in mom's purse when she leaves



→ My friend's son pees in her purse all the time.

→ She takes it with her when she leaves, and he doesn't like when she leaves.

This could be about avoiding separation, not a skill issue.

2 Pooping in his shoes before school



→ My other friend's son pooped in his own shoes (the day before school started again).

Hmm... a little suspicious even without the formal training. He may not want to go to school.

This could be about avoiding school, not a skill issue.

That's not always about skill— it can be *behavior.*

As with anything:

ask why.



Understanding the "why" helps you respond the right way.

Ask why. Get curious.
Find the function. Then, respond.

Imperfection is Okay

Even when a skill is learned,
it won't be perfect every time.



Common contributors to accidents:

- Physical readiness
- Understanding
- Behavioral patterns
- Sensory sensitivities or fears

Give yourself—
and your child—
grace.

You are not doing it wrong.
This is part of the process.

If it feels messy, exhausting,
and unpredictable—
you're doing it right.

Common Challenges

These are normal—and manageable.

1. 

Consistency

Life (school, schedules, responsibilities) makes this hard

→ Consider starting during a break



2. 

Staying Neutral

This process is emotional

→ Stay calm to prevent long-term issues



3. 

Following Your Child's Timeline

Every child progresses differently

4. 

Bowel Training

- Track timing
- Watch for holding patterns
- Stay patient



Non-Bladder Challenges

- Rituals
- Attention-seeking
- Fears (e.g., flushing noise)

Challenges don't mean it's not working.

They're part of the process.

Stay consistent—even when it feels hard.

Troubleshooting Problems

When problems persist, look deeper.

Start Here

- Conduct a simple "why" check
- Look for patterns in behavior

Identify the function behind the behavior.

Possible Causes

- Physical limitations
- Attention
- Rituals or compulsions

The solution depends on the cause.

Intervention must match the function.

Behavior
What we see

Why
The function (the "why")

Response
What we do next

When you understand the "why," you can respond effectively.

Stay focused on the why—not the struggle.

Tips from Other Parents

Real-life tips from families who've been there.



1. Unexpected Wins

Some parents say they couldn't teach bowel movements on the toilet... until their child had a stomach bug and finally had enough opportunities to practice.



2. Small Adjustments That Help

- A different toilet seat made sitting easier
- Motion-sensing lights made the bathroom more reinforcing



3. Reinforcement Tips

- Give the reward while your child is still going (otherwise you might just be rewarding handwashing!)



4. Practical Survival Tips

- Buy extra underwear (a lot)
- Consider a steam cleaner
- Find an air freshener you actually like



5. What to Avoid

- Avoid bathing after every accident
- Avoid letting your child run around naked



6. Mindset Reminders

- Stay consistent
- Don't panic or overreact
- Celebrate small wins



You're not alone—other parents have figured this out too.

Ha Ha... A Mommy Error

Sometimes... we accidentally teach things we didn't mean to.



Joey was getting a little nervous when sitting for a BM, so I found myself telling him, *"You can do it!"* over and over again.



He seemed to understand— or at least I thought he did.



Well... I must have said it a lot, because now he thinks that's what it's called.

The other night, he stood up in the bath and proudly yelled:



...and sure enough— #2 was on its way.



Go ahead, laugh with me, friends.

Oh, the things we accidentally teach our children.

You're learning too—and that's okay.

Proud Moments ABA
Supporting families every step of the way.


Proud Moments ABA

You've got this, and we've got you.

This guide was created to support you and your child through the toilet training journey.

About This Guide

This guide was created to support families navigating toilet training with their child. It combines practical strategies, behavioral insight, and real-life experiences to help you move forward with confidence.



About Proud Moments ABA

Proud Moments ABA provides compassionate, evidence-based ABA therapy to children and families across the country. Our mission is to help every child reach their fullest potential.

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