How to toilet train a child who is too comfortable in diapers.

Esta lección en español

What it is. Toilet training teaches a child to go in the toilet instead of a diaper: feel the need, get there, go, and get something good for it. When a child has worn diapers for years, the diaper has done that job so long that it feels normal, private and easy, and the toilet feels like work.

Why it matters. A diaper asks nothing of a child, so the longer it does the job, the less reason there is to change. The steps below give the toilet a reason and take the diaper's comfort away gently, one small step at a time. They're the same steps for a parent at home, an RBT (registered behavior technician) in session, and a BCBA (board certified behavior analyst) writing the plan.

HOW TO DO IT YOURSELF

How to move from diaper to toilet yourself, in eight steps.

1. **Rule out pain first.** If pooping hurts, stools are hard, large or bloody, your child holds it for days, or they were dry and started having accidents again, see the pediatrician before you start. Constipation often sits behind a child who holds on to the diaper, and a child who hurts will cling to whatever feels safe.
2. **Move the diaper into the bathroom.** From today, every change happens there, standing up. Your child helps: pants down, the poop goes from the diaper into the toilet, and they flush and wave it goodbye. The bathroom becomes the place pee and poop go.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

3. **Switch to underwear while they're awake.** Keep a diaper or pull-up for sleep only. Underwear feels wet and a diaper doesn't, and that feeling is the teacher the diaper has been hiding. Daytime pull-ups feel like a diaper, so they teach like one. Refuses underwear? For a few days, put it on over the diaper, then underwear alone.
4. **Sit on a timer.** Every 30 minutes to start, plus right after waking, after meals and big drinks, and before the bath. Check the underwear first: dry pants earn quiet praise. Then two to three minutes on the toilet, feet on a stool, with a book or a song. No pleading and no holding them there: sitting calmly earns praise too. A few extra drinks give more chances to succeed; never force large amounts.
5. **Save one favorite for the toilet.** Pick something small they really want, like a sticker, a bite of a treat, a toy or a short video clip, and let it happen only when pee or poop lands in the toilet. Give it within a few seconds, with big, short praise: "Pee in the potty! Yes!" Not sure what they'd work for? Run a preference check.
6. **Keep accidents calm and boring.** Say once, "Pee goes in the potty." Your child helps: wet clothes to the hamper, clean underwear on. No scolding, no shame, no long talks. Then back to the timer.
7. **Still only poops in a diaper? Don't take it away; move it toward the toilet.** Five small steps, below. This part can take weeks, and that's normal.
8. **Write it down, and stretch the timer.** Every sit, every success and every accident goes on the log. After a few days it shows when accidents happen: move a sit to just before those times. When most sits end in a success, stretch the timer from 30 to 45, 60, then 90 minutes. When they start telling you or going on their own, that's the goal: celebrate it biggest of all.

Settled, and judgment. Settled: underwear instead of diapers during the day, sits on a schedule, and an immediate reward for going in the toilet are the core of behavioral toilet training, from the first rapid program (Azrin and Foxx, 1971) to school programs for autistic children and children with developmental delays (Cocchiola and colleagues, 2012). Judgment calls, not rules: the step-by-step diaper fade for poop, the 30-minute starting timer, and when to ask for help. And one rule for everyone: parents, grandparents, the RBT and school use the same words, the same timer and the same favorite.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

They pee in the toilet but want the diaper to poop.

This is common. Taking the diaper away can turn into holding it in, which hurts, which makes them hold it more. So move the diaper toward the toilet instead, one step at a time. Behavior analysts call this **shaping**: reaching a goal through small steps the child can already do.

1. **Diaper on, in the bathroom.** When they ask for the diaper to poop, give it, and the poop happens in the bathroom.
2. **Diaper on, sitting on the toilet.**
3. **Diaper loosened, sitting on the toilet.**
4. **Diaper open, or with a hole cut in it, sitting on the toilet,** so the poop lands in the toilet.
5. **No diaper.** Poop in the toilet, and the biggest celebration of the whole plan.

Stay on a step until they poop there calmly two or three times, then move up one. If a step brings back holding or crying, go back one step for a few days. Hard or painful poop, or holding it for days, is a call to the pediatrician.

A judgment call, not a rule. These five steps are one common way to fade the diaper. A BCBA who knows your child may set them differently.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Leo and the diaper he loved.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

Made-up example. The child, the family and the days below are invented to show the method.

Leo is four. He has worn diapers his whole life, hides behind the couch to poop, and says “no potty” whenever he’s asked. His pediatrician finds no constipation. His mom saves one thing for the toilet: a short clip of his favorite train video.

When	What happened
Day 1	Underwear on at breakfast; a diaper only for nap and night. 14 sits, 1 pee in the toilet (the train clip right away), 5 accidents. Mom stays calm; Leo carries his wet clothes to the hamper.
Day 4	14 sits, 5 pees in the toilet, 2 accidents, both near 10:30. Mom moves a sit to 10:15.
Week 2	The timer stretches to 45 minutes; most days are dry. Poop still goes only in a diaper, now only in the bathroom.
Week 4	He poops sitting on the toilet with the diaper on. Next step: a hole cut in the diaper.
Week 6	Poop in the toilet, no diaper. Diapers for night only.

What made it work: the toilet paid off every time, the diaper stopped being comfortable one small step at a time, and nobody made accidents a big deal.

FOR RBTS AND BCBAS

Running it as a program.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

- **Train the parent first.** Toilet training happens at home, all day, so the parent runs it. Teach it the four-step way: tell, show, practice while you watch, feedback (the lesson).
- **Take data at every sit:** the dry check, pee or poop in the toilet, accidents, and asks. The log below has a column for each.
- **Graph two lines per day:** times in the toilet, and accidents (drawing it by hand).
- **Change one thing at a time,** with a phase line, so the graph shows what worked.
- **Write the goal so a stranger could measure it** (how), and set the criteria with the family.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

What stalls toilet training.

- Going back to daytime diapers after a bad day. It teaches that holding out brings the diaper back.
- Pull-ups all day. They feel like a diaper, so they teach like one.
- Asking “Do you need to go?” The answer is almost always no. Say “Potty time” and go.
- Long sits of ten minutes or more, or holding a child on the toilet. The toilet turns into a punishment.
- Scolding or shaming accidents. It teaches hiding, not the toilet.
- A favorite they can get anywhere else, or one that comes long after. Use it only for the toilet, and give it right away.

TRY IT

One question, then the answer.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

A made-up case: Ava's log shows accidents at 9:40, 9:45 and 9:35 on three days in a row. Her sits are at 9:00 and 10:00. What do you change?

▼ Show the answer, and why

Add a sit at about 9:25, just before the accidents usually happen, and give her favorite the moment she goes. Why: the log shows when her body usually goes. A sit just before that time is the best chance for a success you can reward.

Something to keep

The toilet training log: print it, fill it, read it.

DRAGEN ACADEMY · TOILET TRAINING LOG · DRAGEN.CLOUD

Child: _____ Favorite, saved for the toilet: _____ Sit every ___ minutes

Date	Time	Dry at check?	Sat (min)	In the toilet (pee / poop)	Accident (pee / poop)	Asked on their own?	Notes
9/23	9:30	yes	3	pee	—	no	Made-up example row

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

WHERE DRAGEN HELPS

When the paper log gets old.

Everything above is free, and for many families it’s all they need. Talk with your pediatrician and your child’s BCBA if two or three weeks of steady practice bring no progress, if your child is scared of the toilet, or if poop is being held for days.

If you’d rather tap than write, DRAGENfamily logs each sit, success and accident as it happens and shows the last two weeks as a graph, on your own computer at home.

SOURCE

Where this comes from.

Azrin and Foxx (1971), *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 4, 89–99: sits on a schedule and an immediate reward for going in the toilet. Cocchiola, Martino, Dwyer and Demezzo (2012), *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 5(2), 60–64: underwear, scheduled sits and rewards, used at school with autistic children and children with developmental delays. Kroeger and Sorensen (2010), *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 54, 556–567: parents running the program at

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought.

home. Greer, Neidert and Dozier (2016), *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 49, 69–84: the common steps tested one at a time with young children.

Examples on this page are made up. They contain no client, student or family information. This lesson teaches a method; it does not replace your pediatrician, your BCBA or your program.

Free from DRAGEN. Learn it free at dragen.cloud/learn-toilet-training. Free to print, copy and share for your own work, classroom or family; not for resale. Not affiliated with or endorsed by the BACB. General education, not medical or clinical advice for one person. Filled in, a sheet is a private record: store it like one. © 2026 Chase Alexander Hought. Page 8 of 8.