

Greetings BCMS families,

One of the most exciting milestones for many parents of preschoolers is when a child transitions out of wearing diapers. But how do you know when your child is ready to start transitioning? There are, of course, many philosophies about how to approach potty training, but we feel that a child's **readiness** is probably the most important factor in an efficient, successful and happy potty training process. At Big City, we are committed to supporting you and your child through this process, and determining a child's readiness is the first step.

If you've started thinking about potty training your child, the following questions can help you evaluate your child's readiness. You don't have to wait until you've checked off every item to start training. Just look for a general trend toward independence and an understanding of what it means to go to the bathroom like a grown-up.

Physical Signs of Readiness:

- Is your child coordinated enough to walk, and even run, steadily?
- Does your child urinate a fair amount at one time?
- Does your child have regular, well-formed bowel movements at relatively predictable times?
- Does your child's diaper have "dry" periods of at least three or four hours (which shows that his bladder muscles are developed enough to hold urine)?
- Is your child starting to reject diapers? (Running away from you when it's time to be changed, pulling off diaper & wants to stay naked)
- Is your child able to sit down quietly in one position for two to five minutes?
- Is your child able to pull his/her pants up and down easily without any assistance from you?
- Does your child show signs of dislike towards the feeling of wearing a soiled diaper?
- Does your child show interest in others' bathroom habits? (Wants to watch you go to the bathroom or wear underwear)
- Does your child provide the physical or verbal sign when he/she is having a bowel movement such as grunting, squatting, or telling you?
- Does your child demonstrate the desire for independence?
- Does your child take pride in his accomplishments?
- Does your child show any resistance to learning to use the toilet?
- Is your child in his/her cooperative stage of development, and not in the negative or contrary one?

Cognitive Signs:

- Can your child follow simple instructions, such as "go get the toy"?
- Does your child understand the value of putting things where they belong?
- Does your child understand and use language to inform you that they need to go "number one" or "number two"?
- Is your child able to have a conversation about giving up the diaper?

If your child is not telling you when he or she has to use the toilet, that is a sign they may not be quite ready. If you are trying to potty train your child and he or she is having an accident once or more a day, your child is probably not ready. If you are guessing the time of the day your child goes potty then your child is not ready. When a child is forced to potty train before he or she is ready, the process is longer, messier and more challenging and unpleasant for everyone involved--most of all the child. Your child needs to have control over some things in their life, and the one thing they do have control over is the desire to wear underwear and when they choose to do so. Your child will quickly learn that they can control their bodily functions too, and when it's their choice they will give up that diaper. Successful potty training is not about the age or the intelligence of the child, but rather the desire. I have witnessed children who were reading, adding, and talking, and yet refused to use the toilet until they were well past four years old. This is more common in the boys, but girls will do it as well.

And once your child is showing toilet training readiness, most experts even recommend waiting at least three months before you start toilet training to ensure that all is set. Some children toilet train quite easily, while for others it becomes what seems like a long drawn-out battle. Some children will simply toilet train themselves before you even get serious about it. If you are incredibly busy at work, moving to a new house, your child is starting school, or a new baby is due soon, it's ok to wait a few months to let things settle down. This is probably one of the biggest steps for your child and it's worth it to wait. At BCMS we provide diapers at no extra cost, so this should not become a catalyst to push your child to toilet-training before they are ready.

My best advice overall is to be patient, tune in to your child's readiness and set the stage for your child to choose to toilet train.

As an aside, some parents get pressure from grandparents or other family members to potty train children sooner because earlier generations did so. And it's true--in the 1950s babies would generally potty train around 18 months of age. This was still common even into the '60s & '70s. Back then, most families used cheaper cloth diapers instead of disposable diapers. In a cloth diaper, the child feels the soiled diaper and more readily associates it with the act of going potty. Disposable diapers, on the other hand, mask the discomfort of a soiled diaper from the child and thus prolong the learning process for that child. But, given the incredible profits to be made from single-use diapers, it's no surprise that the diaper companies soon succeeded in making their cheaper and more "convenient" disposable diapers dominant in the nursery.

When I started working at BCMS in the '80s, the average age of a child who was out of diapers was between two-and-a-half years old to three; now it's becoming the norm for children to be three and even four years old before giving up diapers. Why is this? I have come to the conclusion that the disposable diaper companies have mastered the formula of having your child simply enjoy the diaper longer. Over the years disposable diapers have been improved for children: they are comfortable, dry, decorated, and come in all sizes. Your child can't even grow out of them! These days, diaper companies even offer "pull-ups" as an alternative to underwear during potty training. But pull-ups are simply another diaper - the ability to pull them up and down does not help with potty training. In fact, they can actually hinder a child from becoming independent from diapers if they are used as a substitute for underwear. At BCMS we only use pull-ups for naps when a child cannot control their bladder while sleeping. Don't get me wrong: pull-ups have their place - for a child who is already toilet trained, and must temporarily endure a long car ride, for example - but they are simply another diaper, not a potty training tool.

I wanted to highlight this issue to point out that while we have a few obstacles to overcome, none of them has to do with your child's intelligence. All children become aware that they need to get out of diapers, and will learn quickly once they are ready.

Toilet Training at BCMS:

We want your child to toilet train as much as you do, and we will do all we can to support your child's process. In order to begin wearing underwear to school, your child must be able to control his bladder or bowels until he or she has time to get to the potty. Our potty is much further away and requires the child to "hold it" for longer. In addition to that, the school day is filled with many distractions which can interfere with your child's ability or willingness to pull him or herself away to go to the bathroom. When you feel that your child is truly mastering the process of toilet training at home and you and your child are ready to try at school, please inform BCMS, so that we may move your child's name on to the toilet training list. Toilet trainers at BCMS are not allowed to go back and forth between diapers and underwear each day. Doing so is confusing for the child and does not reinforce the privilege of wearing underwear at school.

If you are uncertain whether your child is ready to try toilet training at school, but he or she is adamant about trying, inform your child that he or she must stay dry to keep the privilege of wearing underwear. At BCMS we allow one accident a day, and then we put your child back into a diaper and encourage him or her to try again the next day. Or, depending on the child, he or she may receive a second chance to try. It's like a game or a challenge offered by the teacher to get the child motivated to take ownership. If your child's intention is to wear underwear at school this will motivate them.

Naptime can be a challenge even for an otherwise successful potty trainer. If your child keeps having accidents while sleeping, we will use a diaper under your child's underwear for naptime and remove it when he or she awakes.

We always give great words of encouragement while teaching your child to be in charge of his or her bladder instead of us. Sometimes a child may continue to have accidents regularly or will not communicate about his or her needs. In this case, we may ask to take a break from toilet training at school and try another time, rather than continuing to create frustration for all involved - especially the child. My staff knows when a child is mature enough or needs more time. BCMS has an environment that can be very challenging to a novice holding their bladder or bowel movement, and your child may simply need more time to master the skill in a safe place like home. This is just a little set back and in about two months your child can try again and in most cases they will be more successful. Your child may lose interest in the toilet even at home. Please be patient and give it a few months and then start again.

Incidentally, we want to reassure you that when your child wears a diaper at school while toileting at home, it does not cause confusion for the child. In some cases, children will toilet train at school and continue wearing a diaper at home. My daughter, Jennifer, did just that. I asked her why she wanted her diaper at home and she replied "tired." Two months later, she gave up the diaper at home during the day. The sleeping or night diaper followed a few months later.

On a practical note, we ask that you keep **at least one change of clothes** in your child's cubby at all times: pants, shirts, underwear, socks, and shoes. Check your child's cubby regularly for soiled clothes and remember to bring new ones for the next day. If your child runs out we may only have one option left and that is a diaper, or we may even have to call you to bring clothes for your child.

General Tips for Toilet-Training Your Child:

- + Save the money and don't buy a potty chair, instead buy the potty ring and a stool. Potty chairs were designed for very young children who could not climb up to the big toilet, and the potty chair could be placed in the kitchen where mom and the child would practice.
- + To avoid accidents provide loose clothing that do not require belts or snaps. Stay away from overalls as well.
- + Let your child see you go. This is very important way of you helping your child learning the next step to independence of the diaper.
- + Take them to all sorts of bathroom places; this will get them comfortable with different places to go. Always be positive and be careful not to say anything that may make your child feel uncomfortable to go in a public place. Because you will not have the potty ring, be sure to hold the child and talk about topics that keep your child distracted from the feeling the sensation of falling in. This is the number one fear most children have about using toilets outside the home. The other is germs, be careful not to talk too much about the bathroom, instead focus on cleaning hands after every use.

+ When your child is starting to use the potty the first few times, stay with your child whole time they are on the potty. Reading stories when your child is trying to have a bowel movement keeps them from getting frustrated. It is also a positive way to get special attention from you, and will both encourage your child to inform you when he/she has a bowel movement as well as reduce accidents. After the habit of going is in place then you can start handing them a book to look at and find an excuse why you need to leave for a moment and will return to help when he/she is finished going. (This worked with my two children extremely well.)

+ If your child is sitting on the toilet and you are sure they need to go, try running the faucet or making the pee sound (sssssss!). This will often encourage your child to go. I used that with my daughter Jennifer often when she told me she did not have to go and would just sit there and I knew she had to go. This comes in handy when you have to leave the house in a hurry or bed time.

+ When your child is becoming more independent and they only need you to wipe, this is a good time to introduce the next step of learning how to clean their own private parts. When a child goes to kindergarten they will no longer have assistants and will need to possess these important skills for their personal toileting needs.

+ Night training comes with time and a child that uses underwear during the day may need a diaper when they are sleeping for at least two to three months more. Try not to get rid of the napping and night diapers too quickly. That may backfire. If your child wakes up dry for several days, ask your child before going to bed if they would like to sleep diaper-free. If you have a child who will wake up to be changed during the night they may do this more quickly. Deep sleepers may need more time. Always get your child to sit on the toilet right when they wake up to avoid accidents. Some children can be as old as six before giving up the night diaper. If you get concerned, you can always seek advice from your child's doctor.

+ Talk with your spouse about the underwear you bought for your child while your child is in earshot. Promote them, how soft and wonderful they are. This will plant the desire to wear the underwear. You can also talk about how the diapers cost money and you rather buy other things for the family. You can even pull out the toy section of the newspaper and entice the little one, by offering a deal: "When you are wearing underwear during the day and we are not spending as much money on diapers, we are going to buy you a toy for giving up those diapers!" (Bribery has its place, just not all the time.) This tip worked for my son, Robert. He was out of diapers fast. That's because it was his goal, not mine. Just be careful to remove the big, red battery-operated car – yep, that is what he chose.

+ If your child is earning a prize with potty training, make sure your child goes at least two weeks. Mark the shopping day on the calendar if he/she remains dry. If your child has an accident, remind him/her to try again and re-mark the calendar. This method works for verbal children who can understand this concept.

+ Inform the teacher that you would like a third party to talk about why it's time to wear underwear and use the potty. At BCMS we have a book that we will read and also provide a lesson about growing up and using the toilet to help promote the idea for you.

+ Diaper rash will also promote the desire to give up the diaper. This is another time you can have dialog about why your child needs to use underwear. Explain and teach your child that diaper rashes can be prevented if you start to wear underwear. (Note: if your child is still in a diaper and getting diaper rashes, one way to help relieve them is a shallow bath with baking soda. Towel dry them, place them on their back, and run a warm to hot blow dryer back and forth quickly about four to five inches away from your child's bottom. You will see the rash significantly reduce and in some cases disappear. I also learned not to put anything on afterwards; the creams sometime irritated the rash more. The best thing after the blow dry is to let them run around without the diaper. This may even encourage the great feeling of not having one and lead to toilet training.)

+ Get your child to be part of his/her toileting. When your child has a potty accident, remember not to be quick about changing your child and get your child involved, have your child try to take off the wet clothes with as little help as you can. If you need to wash your child, keep it quick and short and not too enjoyable. A quick shower will work. Have your child help as much as possible; they can dry themselves, put on their own clothes, and this is a great time for PJ's. All of this will help your child remember for next time.

+ If your child is getting close to four years old, and you are now feeling it's time for your child to use underwear, try informing your child that you ran out of diapers and you only have a few for night time.

+ Keep underwear in the child's cubby. Even if your child is not ready, we can try at BCMS if your child shows interest. This works well for children we feel are old enough and should be wearing underwear. Sometimes when we ask your child "are ready to try underwear?" the answer is "yes" - and sometimes they ask us! We want to be prepared to assist your child.

We hope you find this primer on potty training useful and we encourage you to follow up with any questions you may have for us regarding this process or your child.

Sincerely,

Miss Amanda