

Will My Preschooler EVER Be Potty Trained?

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I know it's so inappropriate, but I'm staring at butts. It's the first day of preschool. I do a quick scan around the classroom and realize my son is the only kid wearing Pull-Ups.

Instead of an elastic waistband peeking out of his jeans, he's got the telltale bulky "diaper butt." Thankfully he's blissfully unaware, but a wave of guilt immediately washes over me.

I'm sure his failure to be potty trained is somehow my fault.

Jack was well on his way to being ready when he was about 2 years old. The daycare he was attending was diligent about potty training, lining all the kids up for a potty break every hour or so. But with our second child on the way I had heard there might be some regression. I didn't want to have to start all over again once the new baby arrived. It didn't help any that I was the size of a hot air balloon and was having difficulty moving around let alone finding the patience for potty training.

We would wait until things were a little more settled and then we would focus on potty training. Ha, if I had only known! As we "settled" into life with a new baby and a still-not-potty-trained toddler, I armed myself with knowledge. I read magazine articles, I skimmed potty training books, I asked friends what they had done. I even had an awkward conversation with my mother-in-law asking what her trick had been with all five of her children. I believed I was well informed on the subject of potty training.

I included Jack in the process, too. We read fun books about going potty ("Everyone Poops" was a favorite). When Jack opened his brand-new "big boy potty" he clapped his hands with excitement. He was very proud of his new potty.

"This is going to be easy," I smugly thought to myself.

At first we tried the usual techniques, starting with praise and simple sticker charts, then on to rewards of small toys and even the dreaded candy. Then we resorted to the not-so-usual, offering him money for his "potty jar," or allowing him to wear a "potty crown" that he had decorated himself.

We even had a “Bye Bye, Diapers. Hello, Underwear” party (complete with cupcakes and brand-new Lightning McQueen underwear). There were special toys he could play with while he was on the potty (for obvious reasons this one may not have been the best idea. Soggy trucks). I even made an elaborate pirate-themed chart with stick-on compasses for each potty trip.

I tried them all. And Jack seemed right on board with each new venture. His sweet little face always lit up at my enthusiasm. But soon it was clear his interest had waned. When I would ask if he needed to use the potty, he would politely reply, “No, thanks. I’m fine.” And really, how can you argue with someone so sure of himself? Until, of course, he pees on the floor. Then looking at me with those big chocolate brown eyes he would say, “Oh, that’s okay.”

Over the course of two years (yes, two years!) I tried every technique I could think of and then some, all the while exhibiting much more patience than I thought humanly possible. But it still wasn’t clicking. Where, oh, where had I gone wrong?

Then one day I realized I had been a fool. My son is a smart kid. Why would he ever want to be potty trained if it meant the end of his charts, his presents, and the enthusiastic responses he got from everyone he cared about.

I had an epiphany. I knew what I had to do. I knew it was going to be messy, not to mention slightly frustrating and laundry generating, but it was time to go cold turkey. No more diapers, period.

And you know what? The process went better than I had expected. Sure, we had some “accidents” and had to do some quick changes in the parking lot. We even had a time or two when I wasn’t so prepared and didn’t think to bring a change of clothes (Mother-of-the-Year material, right?).

I do still have to remind him to use the potty. But I’m thrilled to say by Jack’s 4th birthday he was potty trained. Finally.

And I have one less child with “diaper butt.”

By Cassi Denari