



Toddler

Potty Training: Are You Being Too Strict?

Posted by [Jeanne Sager](#) on April 14, 2010 at 7:30 AM



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Before I even considered **potty training** my daughter, I hit other parents up for ideas.

Big mistake: half of them told me I needed to be very **regimented** with my stubborn little girl. The other half? Of course they told me to just **let it flow** naturally.

To save you the frustration of going back and forth, we asked [Dr. Charlotte Reznick](#), an associate professor of psychology at UCLA and author of [The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success](#), if it's possible to be too strict or too loose when it comes to potty training.

Is it better to set up a strict regimen for potty training or go with the flow?

It really depends on the personality of your child. Some kids really thrive on a very structured environment, while others have their own little ideas.

Natalie, an adorable 18-month old started complaining of wet diapers at her early age. She wanted to be changed as soon as she felt wet. Her mom casually said, "Okay honey, let's try sitting on the potty and peeing in it. That way you don't have to be wet." And very soon, Natalie basically potty-trained herself.

While Aaron, 3, had absolutely no interest in wasting his time sitting on some "stupid potty." He was too busy running around in his Star Wars costume and couldn't be bothered. So his mom finally set up a sticker chart system with his favorite rockets as a reward: initially for just sitting, then for peeing, then for pooping. It worked like a charm.

Why is one better than the other or why ISN'T one better than the other?

One system isn't better than the other. The key is knowing your child's unique needs and, frankly, your own. Some parents feel a need for lots more structure than others and they should honor that. Your kids will pick up on how you feel and it will affect them.

So if you're a "loosey goosey" and try a strict regime when it's not in your DNA, it probably won't work as well as following your own gut instincts AND combining that with your child's unique predisposition. Some kids absolutely thrive with strict structure, while others need some leeway . . . and time. Little Natalie loved it when her mom read stories to her while she sat on the potty. Soothing background music calmed Aaron down enough to do his business.

How do you know what will work for your family?

Start with what feels right for you and your child. Easy does it -- no forcing -- make it fun. Kids usually tell you when they're ready like little Natalie; but if it's time to go to preschool and your kid shows no interest, and he needs to be trained before they accept him, then it's perfectly fine to start a game of it and see how it rolls . . . with lots of love and good humor!

What's your potty training M.O.?

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