



# Mott Poll Report

July 21, 2025  
Volume 47  
Issue 5

## Navigating the Path to Potty Training

The transition from diapers to using the toilet is a major step for young children – and their parents. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children age 1-6 years about their experiences with potty training.

Most parents report their child is either completely potty trained (41%) or in the process (35%). The most common age that parents say they started potty training is 2 years (54%), though 21% say they started before that, 22% at age 3, and about 3% at age 4 or older. Most parents report that they started potty training when their child seemed ready (75%). Other factors contributing to the decision include needing their child to be potty trained for daycare or preschool (22%), diapers being too expensive (19%), parenting books or resources (14%), and talking with their child's healthcare provider (13%). Six percent of parents think they started potty training before their child was ready, while 3% feel they started too late.

Parents' most common potty training methods are taking their child to the potty regularly (71%), giving rewards for using the potty (53%), having the child go without diapers during the day (45%), and trying to make it fun (41%). Sixteen percent of parents say they tried 3-day potty training, while 14% report using no specific method.

Half of parents (51%) say potty training was about what they expected, while 26% say it was easier than expected and 22% harder than expected. The most common difficulty parents recall is the child not being cooperative (31%), challenges coordinating between home and daycare (17%), parents being too busy (16%), and family disruptions (11%); 39% of parents say nothing was difficult about potty training.

During potty training, about one-third of parents (35%) say their child had night-time accidents, 33% say their child seemed fully trained but then started having accidents (regression), and 19% say their child had potty anxiety. Eight percent report problems with constipation or encopresis.

## Potty training problems

% of parents noting difficulty with potty training their child

Child not cooperating	31%
Coordinating between home and daycare	17%
Parents too busy	16%
Family disruption	11%

### Report Highlights

1 in 5 parents factored in diaper costs in deciding when to start potty training.

Over half of parents began potty training their child at age 2.

1 in 5 parents say their child had potty anxiety during potty training.

## Data Source & Methods

*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2025 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 1-18 years living in their household (n=2,021). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 67% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 820 parents with at least one child age 1-6. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 4 percentage points.*

*A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.*

*Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.*

### C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

**Co-Director:**

Sarah J. Clark, MPH

**Co-Director:**

Susan J. Woolford, MD, MPH

**Poll Manager:**

Sara L. Schultz, MPS

**Data Analyst:**

Acham Gebremariam, MS

**Student Research Assistant:**

Sahana Raja



**SUSAN B. MEISTER  
CHILD HEALTH EVALUATION  
AND RESEARCH CENTER**  
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

## Implications

Learning to use the toilet is a major step in a young child's development and a process that requires time, patience, and consistency from parents. While many families begin potty training between the ages of 2 and 3, every child progresses at their own pace, and the road to being fully potty trained is not always a straight line. This Mott Poll demonstrates that parents are approaching potty training thoughtfully, tailoring their strategies to match their child's behavior, family routines, and practical needs. Still, it's a process that often includes setbacks, frustrations, and moments of uncertainty.

Being potty trained can mean different things at different stages. In general, it means that a child knows how to use the toilet and no longer needs to wear diapers. Occasional accidents, however, are normal even among children who are mostly or fully potty trained. Understanding that potty training is a gradual process, rather than a single milestone, can help parents adjust expectations and respond more patiently to challenges.

Most parents in this Mott Poll said they waited until their child seemed "ready" to start potty training, following a child-led approach that aligns with expert guidance. Signs of readiness include staying dry for longer periods, showing interest in the bathroom, undressing themselves, hiding to urinate or poop, and being able to follow simple directions. Developmental signs like being able to communicate needs, mimic adult behavior, and possessing adequate gross motor skills are also important indicators. While following a child's lead can help ease the process, not every family has the flexibility to wait. Some parents start earlier than they'd like due to daycare requirements, if the child has special needs, major family dynamic changes (e.g., moving to a new home or parents getting a divorce), or the rising cost of diapers, which can lead to stress if the child isn't quite ready.

Other families preferred a parent-led routine with structured bathroom times; this can be particularly helpful when multiple caregivers are involved. Some parents opted for more intensive approaches, like 3-day potty training, which can be effective when there's a time-sensitive need but may feel too rigid or overwhelming for others.

To support their overall approach, parents in this Mott Poll deployed an array of strategies, such as offering rewards, letting their child go without diapers during the day, or turning the process into a game to make it more engaging. Regardless of method, the most important factors are consistency, encouragement, and making the experience as positive and low-pressure as possible.

While half of parents found potty training to be about what they expected, almost 1 in 4 found it more difficult. Lack of cooperation from the child was the most frequently reported issue, but parents should remember children may be anxious about using the toilet, afraid of loud flushing sounds, or uncomfortable sitting on an adult-sized seat. Some children may refuse to try altogether. In these cases, parents can focus on making the bathroom a calm, non-threatening space by using books, songs, or toys, or simply spending time there without pressure to perform. Using a child-sized potty or a seat with foot support can also make a big difference in comfort and confidence. In some cases, conditions like encopresis or constipation may be contributing to the difficulties. Increasing the child's intake of fiber and fluids can sometimes help to avoid these problems. When difficulties persist, especially if a child shows signs of pain, chronic withholding, or ongoing anxiety, it may be time to consult a pediatrician.

Parents who do encounter struggles shouldn't feel like they've failed. Potty training is not always a straight path, and many children take time to master each step. Simple tools and strategies, like sticker charts, potty-only toys, and consistent routines, can go a long way. So can giving praise, offering privacy, and being patient during setbacks. Arranging play dates with children who are slightly older than your child and who are potty trained can be a way to encourage an interest in potty training. Avoiding punishments and not comparing one child's progress to another's helps keep the experience positive and respectful for the child.