

# Getting Down and Dirty with Potty Mastery

Presented by: Joan Morgenstern  
 Director of Parent Education and Community Outreach  
 Email: [jmorgenstern@senderspediatrics.com](mailto:jmorgenstern@senderspediatrics.com)

## POTTY MASTERY vs. POTTY TRAINING

**Training:** Something we do to another person with the goal of achieving a specific outcome

- **Habit Training:** Eliminating in the potty becomes a learned habit by repeating the behavior over and over in the same way

**Mastery:** The process of acquiring a new skill that develops over time and with patience

- **Spontaneous Recognition:** Child becomes consciously aware of the physical sensations that signal the need to urinate/defecate

We **don't train children** to use the potty; we **support children's mastery** with our beliefs, energy, attention, intentions, and resources

**Potty Learning** supports children's **Potty Mastery**

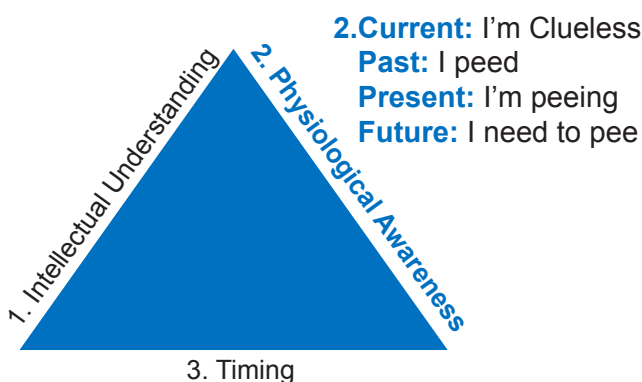
- **Indirect learning:** Child acquires knowledge through play and by observing others
- **Direct Learning:** Specific instructions directed towards child

### 2 Parts to Potty Mastery:

#### Will:

- Child sustains a strong, healthy and attuned connection with the important adults in their life
- The child's worth is not predicated upon their success using the potty

#### Skills:



### Put the skills together:

Child **listens** to their body and recognizes the physical sensations associated with urinating/defecating

Child **takes care** of their body by putting their pee and poop inside the potty

#### Pre-Work: Tell children:

- They **listen to their body** when they ask for food and water
- They **take care of their body** by eating healthy food, washing hands, cleaning boo boos, dressing appropriately for the weather, etc.

## THE WHY OF POTTY MASTERY

#### It...

- Reflects **cultural norms** and **societal customs**
- Supports actions of **self-care** in service of children's physical needs
- Promotes **agency** by enabling children to see they can **affect an outcome**
- Encourages **autonomy** by supporting children's **independence**
- Instills **ownership** by helping children see that they are **in charge of their own body**

#### WHY does this feel so BIG?

- This developmental milestone is one of the **first times** that teachers and parents are directing a child's learning with **one specific outcome**

## THE WHAT OF POTTY MASTERY

### READINESS:

- **Child Readiness:**
  - **Communicates** verbally/non-verbally the need to use the potty
  - Shows **willingness/interest** in self-care activities: dressing, feeding, etc.
  - **Makes connections and associations** when using play materials
- **Adult Readiness:**
  - Adult understands **potty mastery is a process**, not an event
  - Recognizes **accidents are a necessary** and important part of the process
  - Knows they **cannot MAKE a child “go potty”**
  - **Manages their** strong **feelings**
  - **Believes the child is capable** of this new learning

### TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP:

#### Learning is not a place – it’s a relationship

- **Secure Attachments:** Help children **feel calm and safe** so their nervous systems develop under optimal conditions
- **Unconditional Positive Regard:** **Accepts children as they are**, instead of as we want them to be
- **Shame:** A **toxic emotion** that can unintentionally get transmitted to children during potty mastery



## THE HOW OF POTTY MASTERY

### LANGUAGE: You have a **NEW JOB**

- **Title:** **BODY BOSS**
- **Job Description:**
  - You **LISTEN** to your body so you recognize when you need to pee and poop
  - You **TAKE CARE** of your body by putting your pee and poop in the potty

### Asleep vs. Awake:

- Staying dry while awake and staying dry when asleep are not the same
- Child wears a diaper at naptime because the child is **“off the job!”**

### THE ENVIRONMENT: EC CLASSROOM:

#### Indirect Learning

- Peer Modeling
- Library Storytime
- Puppets and Finger Plays
- Micro-Dramatic Play
- Macro-Dramatic Play
- Aesthetically Pleasing Bathroom

### COMMUNICATION

#### Strengthen the relationship as you work toward a new goal

- **Connect** before you correct
- Provide **equally weighted choices** – not weighted choices
- **Avoid comparing** children
- Describe the situation – when accidents occur **state the facts** and avoid asking questions
- **Encourage vs. Praise:** **Inspire** don't **Judge**
  - *You figured out how to ...*
  - *“You did it! You listened to your body and recognized that you needed to poop!”*
  - *“You’re learning to listen to your body; it won’t be long before you’re able to recognize when you need to pee.”*
  - *“Tell me what you did. How did that make you feel?”*
  - *“This is hard to do, but you’re sticking with it. It won’t be long before you’re able to put your poop and pee in the potty.”*

## OH, SH\*T – HERE’S THE POOP!

- **Potty Mastery:** Can mark the onset of **constipation and withholding issues** for children
- **First Priority:** **Get the poop out** – even if it doesn’t go in the potty
- **Potty Mastery Trajectory:** Many children **put their pee in the potty first** - before they put their poop in the potty
- **Reasons Include the following:**
  - **Fear of the Unknown** – for their entire life the child has pooped and pee in a diaper
  - The new, unfamiliar and **strange feeling** of sitting on a toilet may feel **awkward, or unsafe**
  - **What to do:** Think about your **students temperaments** as you approach this new learning
  - **Fear of Body Loss:** pooping in the potty feels like a piece of the child’s body is **coming out** or falling away
  - The warm soft poop that surrounds the child’s “bottom” provides **familiarity, comfort and safety**
  - **What to do:** Have the child **sit on the toilet while wearing a diaper** – this will help normalize the experience before removing the diaper



- **Negative Experience** – child **internalizes** that **pooping** in the potty is **not safe**
- **Some examples include:**
  - Feeling shamed or embarrassed about having an accident
- **What to do:** use **supportive language**
- Feeling overly pressured to produce a bowel movement
- **What to do:** remain, **calm and relaxed** – encourage the child to do **deep breathing** exercises while on the potty
- Being whisked off to the potty during a bowel movement
- **What to do:** **avoid interrupting** a child in the middle of a **bowel movement**
- Needing more time to poop than is allotted
- **What to do:** **avoid rushing** children on the potty
- Being splashed or unpleasantly surprised by the poop hitting the toilet
- **What to do:** allow child to **reenact the experience** using a doll and fake poop



- **Difficulty Sitting Still** – child is **impulsive** or **impatient**
- Child isn't interested in sitting on the potty long enough to complete a bowel movement
- **What to do:** provide a basket of fidget/relaxation toys that are appropriate in the bathroom
- **Position** – child stands when pooping and may even push against a wall
- This child's **physical stance** is **out-of-sync** with the need to squat on the potty
- **What to do:** Normalize the squatting position in **playful interactions** both inside the classroom and on the playground
- Have the child **sit backwards** on the potty and push against the toilet lid for leverage
- **Preoccupied** – child **tunes-out** or **ignores** the need to defecate
- This can get exacerbated at school if a child **leaves** a toy/play area to use the potty and another child **takes over** their space
- **What to do:** Create a **classroom symbol** that a child can easily retrieve to **secure** their space when they use the potty

- **Constipation:** pooping in the potty is associated with **pain**
- The process unfold like this:
- Child **disregards** the **urge** to defecate
- Child eventually tries to defecate and **experiences intense pain** by trying to pass hard stool
- Child creates a physical connection that **pooping in the potty is painful (unsafe)**
- Child sits on the potty – (child's **body remembers** that pooping is not safe.)
- Child's **anus sphincter muscle tightens** and restricts the child's ability to void (dyssynergic defecation)
- Child either has a bowel movement when she leaves toilet (her body is now calm and relaxed) or, the child continues a **pattern of withholding**
- Child **remains constipated** and the **cycle perpetuates**
- **What to do:** encourage parents to seek **medical help** to remediate the constipation
- Create a **social story** for the child

