

## **Potty Training**

By Kathleen Chin and Laurie Boucke, Adoptive Moms

Did you know that your newly adopted baby might already be toilet trained (or well underway) when you first meet? Be sure to ask when you are in China! While you're at it, find out exactly how to continue the toileting process your baby is familiar with so you can maintain continuity when you return home. For example, it is possible that your baby will respond to a whistling sound that serves as a signal to "go" potty. Ask to hear a demonstration of the sound! The sound of running water may also be your baby's elimination signal, so turning on the bathtub water or sink faucet may work too.

How can parents in China potty train their child so young? There is an elimination awareness "window of learning" open from birth to about 6 months of age. If parents tap into this sensitive period, they generally have good results with toilet training. In China and many other countries, parents report completion between the ages of 12-15 months. In Western countries, completion of potty training tends to be around 18-24 months, or even later.

When I became a parent, I realized that my mom, busy raising seven children, made an amazing accomplishment in potty training all of us by the time we were a year old. My first two daughters (now 11 and 9) didn't finish potty training until they were 3-1/2 years old. When we prepared for our trip to China last September to pick up 8-month-old Kelli, the thought of toilet training never even crossed my mind.

I learned many things about Kelli during my time in the hotel, including that she knew how to potty in the toilet. After four days with Kelli, she was terribly constipated. We gave her lots of liquids and rubbed her tummy, but nothing worked. By the end of day four, I noticed she kept grunting like she had to poop. I thought, "If she can potty in the toilet, why not let her try to poop there too?" Sure enough, that's exactly what she wanted to do! She wasn't used to pooping in a diaper. What an exciting breakthrough!

I began to wonder how babies in the orphanages start toilet learning so young. If you look closely at the rows of high chairs in the orphanages, you'll notice that not only are they used for feeding the babies but also for potty training. There is a hole in the seat with a little door below where a potty bowl is placed. That's right – a high chair doubles as a potty, and that's how they start potty training in Chinese orphanages.

I arrived home from China, anxious to learn more. I came across the book [Infant Potty Training](#) by Laurie Boucke and read it from start to finish. The concept was different compared to American potty training, but I was highly motivated for a different approach to this age-old parenting task. I was ready to put this new parenting knowledge to the test. Here are the four steps to start:

### **1. Observation**

Watch and listen for your child's individual timing, how long and how frequently she goes after waking or feeding. Look for her body language, such as twisting or grimacing while defecating, and listen for sounds, like grunting while defecating.

### **2. Anticipation or Intuition**

Anticipate when your child needs to go, and then at that moment, make the whistling sound or some other verbal cue. Within a few days, she will associate this sound with elimination.

### **3. Position & Toilet Place**

When you think your baby needs to go, hold her gently and securely over your preferred toilet place while giving your audible signal. She will soon associate the sound, position and toilet place with elimination.

### **4. Baby-Mother Communication**

From now on, pay close attention to your baby's timing and signals. When you think she needs to go, hold her in position and give your signal. If it is near time to go, babies are able to relax those muscles upon receiving your cues.

Using infant potty with your baby enhances bonding through closeness and communication. It is also environmentally friendly – it conserves trees, water, petroleum, and landfill space. Although most parents use diapers in between toilet visits, the number of diapers is drastically reduced over time, and babies are out of diapers relatively early.

The Western world has been indoctrinated to reject any form of early toilet learning. Our doubts stem from maturational readiness theories based on opinion and commercialism rather than scientific proof. Millions of happy babies in China can't be wrong! By changing our attitude from skepticism to recognizing our babies' amazing abilities, we open new doors. With infant potty, timing is based on baby's natural rhythms and on spontaneous and learned communication between mother and baby. There is no punishment, anger or coercion involved.

It is important to realize that this is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. The key is to find a realistic balance. If need be, part-time potty works fine and will not confuse your baby, as long as you dedicate some time each day and are fairly consistent. Even if you can only concentrate on it in relation to a few feedings a day, this is fine. When your schedule allows, potty your baby at regular times. If siblings are at home or if you have one or more willing caregivers, teach them how to potty your baby. Many families work on toilet learning simultaneously with an infant and a toddler and find that the children motivate each other. Older siblings can help potty babies and are sometimes able to "read" their baby brother or sister and anticipate the next toilet visit.

Don't be discouraged by setbacks. They are normal and can occur for a number of reasons such as teething, illness, emotional upset, or developmental milestones. It is fine to reduce or take a break from potty visits. If your baby resists potty, be creative and try to find ways to interest her, but if she continues to protest, don't persist. If you are tired or ill, don't feel guilty about taking a break. The only rules are to stay relaxed and nonpunitive, and to keep baby safe and comfortable.

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