

Match the
toilet training to
your child's unique
personality and
temperament!

STRESS-FREE POTTY TRAINING



**A Commonsense Guide
to Finding the
Right Approach
for Your Child**

Sara Au and Peter Stavinoha, Ph.D.

Advance praise for
Stress-Free Potty Training

“This thoughtful, well-written guide contains so much more than advice on potty training, as parents will understand a lot about what makes their particular child tick. The perspective is wonderful—Au and Stavinoha wisely point out that, ‘as parents we can manage and influence the training, but children themselves control it.’ I recommend this book enthusiastically!”

—Robert F. Newby, Ph.D., Pediatric Neuropsychologist,
Medical College of Wisconsin

“Potty training can be very challenging for both parents and children, but **Stress-Free Potty Training** provides a powerful, unique approach based on a child’s individuality. As a mom of two young boys, [I found] these techniques to be invaluable; the book is a must read for every parent.”

—Michelle Stevens, Editor, *Central Florida Moms Magazine*,
and co-host of the *Madness of Motherhood Show* podcast

“This book is a welcome resource in helping parents customize toilet training for their children. It is written in plain English, pairs guidelines with flexibility, and insightfully recognizes that there are multiple routes to toilet training, allowing parents to set aside stress as they attend to their children’s needs as individuals.”

—Christopher P. Wiebusch, Ph.D., Pediatric Neuropsychology
and Treatment Associates, SC

“*Stress-Free Potty Training* has really taken the stress out of training for our family. Pete and Sara make it easy to understand the process, and the training tips are priceless. We take Dr. Pete into the bathroom with us every time.”

—Chris Tynan Huston, Senior Producer, *Good Morning Texas*

“This book is an easy and enjoyable read. So much of it reads like a welcome conversation with trusted friends who have ‘been there, done that.’ Yet the expertise of the authors really shines through. With this book, potty training can be a wonderful first success in the many hoops and hurdles of parenting.”

—Kristy Hagar, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist,
Children’s Medical Center Dallas

Stress-Free Potty Training

This page intentionally left blank

Stress-Free Potty Training

A Commonsense Guide
to Finding the Right Approach
for Your Child

Sara Au

Peter L. Stavinoha, Ph.D.



AMACOM

American Management Association

New York • Atlanta • Brussels • Chicago • Mexico City
San Francisco Shanghai • Tokyo • Toronto • Washington, D. C.

Special discounts on bulk quantities of AMACOM books are available to corporations, professional associations, and other organizations. For details, contact Special Sales Department, AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Tel: 212-903-8316. Fax: 212-903-8083.

E-mail: specialsls@amanet.org

Website: www.amacombooks.org/go/specialsales

To view all AMACOM titles go to: www.amacombooks.org

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Au, Sara.

Stress-free potty training : a commonsense guide to finding the right approach for your child / Sara Au, Peter Stavinoha.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8144-0162-0

ISBN-10: 0-8144-0162-7

1. Toilet training. 2. Child rearing. I. Stavinoha, Peter. II. Title.

HQ770.5.A9 2008

649'.62—dc22

2008001435

© 2008 Peter L. Stavinoha and Sara Au

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

Illustrations by Kelly Light.

This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Printing number

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Introduction and Philosophy	1
1 Identifying Your Child's Personality Type	7
2 Determining Readiness	19
3 Universal Strategies	31
4 The Goal-Directed Child	67
5 The Sensory-Oriented Child	83
6 The Internalizer	101
7 The Impulsive Child	121
8 The Strong-Willed Child	139
9 Interruptions and Setbacks	167
Conclusion	173
Index	177

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction and Philosophy

Teaching your children everything you can to help them become functioning members of society is what parenting is all about. From the moment they are born, every single act of ours teaches them something, for better or worse. As babies, when they cry, we give them food. When they are tired, we rock them to sleep. When they eliminate waste, we change their diaper.

Hmmmm . . . let's think about that last one again. Until this point in their very short lives, they have learned that the *correct* thing to do is to pee and poop into a diaper. We've taught them this lesson, and most of us have probably taught it well. Your children are so good at this skill, they probably don't even think about it anymore.

That's all about to change.

Potty training encompasses not only teaching new skills to your child, but also unlearning behaviors they thought they already had down pat. There's no getting around it, potty training is a huge undertaking for both kids and parents alike. Going into a diaper has become second nature to your kids, just as using a toilet is second nature to adults. Imagine

if someone came to you one day and said you couldn't use a toilet anymore, that you had to use this newfangled thing that was nearly as big as you are and made loud, scary noises! You'd probably be a little confused and intimidated.

Does this perspective give you some idea of what your child is about to experience? Good! That's what this book is all about: Helping parents view things from a child's point of view. Potty training should be stress free for parents, and (as much as possible) for kids, too! Stressing about this major milestone will only harm the process, bog it down, and eventually, derail it. So, in keeping it stress free, you are doing what's best for your son or daughter.

You—being the conscientious parent that you are—want to go about potty training in a careful, thoughtful way that considers your child's individual needs. You know this is a big step and you want to make it as easy and comfortable for your “baby” as possible. You've probably heard horror stories from other parents and want to avoid getting into those kinds of situations yourself. In short, you want to do right by your child.

Our methods are not tricks we guarantee will work in a prescribed amount of time. Nor do we give you step-by-step directions that if followed result in absolute certain success. Parents do not control this process (that might sound shocking, but get used to the idea that you are not really in charge here), nor do we really *control* any process with our children. Our philosophy is that as parents we can manage and influence the training, but that children themselves control it. They have their own natural pace at which they will learn to use the toilet. Through thoughtful planning and effective communication with your unique child, you are setting the stage for your child to own the process and be successful at it.

If you're like many parents, you may feel overwhelmed at the thought of starting to potty train. Unlike riding a bike, you probably have no memories of learning bathroom skills as a child, so how can you teach them to your son or daughter? To boot, others (maybe your mother- or sister-in-law, or that oh-so-helpful neighbor . . .) are often watching over your shoulder, which can leave you anxious and unsure in your abilities to handle this fundamental parenting task.

You're not sure about the hype of those train-in-one-day programs, but on the other hand, can't imagine waiting until your child

decides to do it on their own. After all, they have no trouble walking around in a wet or dirty diaper for hours. What all this tells you, is that you can't start by planning on the exact amount of time it is going to take to train! (Talk about setting yourself up for failure.) Every child potty trains differently; besides, even those one-day methods take a great deal more days in preparation.

We believe toileting proficiency is one of the most important skills you'll teach your child, fundamental to personal hygiene, health, even social relationships for the rest of his/her life. Being comfortable with one's own body starts with this first foray into being responsible for oneself. So, you don't want to rush in headlong without a thoughtful plan. We recognize, of course, that you don't want to dilly dally either. You want to instruct your child in the most insightful, caring way possible, and to do that you must take his or her individual personality into account.

But where to begin? You don't want to miss your window of opportunity with your toddler, but you don't want to force the issue too early and short-circuit the whole process either.

Welcome to the real world of parenting, where there's no magical solution to any tough issue, just advice from experts and veteran parents, a multitude of proven strategies and tons of moral support, and of course, your own instincts and knowledge of your child—the most important ingredient.

In fact, you already have the knowledge you need to help your toddler potty train; you just may need to be pointed in the right direction. You know your child best. You know everything about him. You know his likes and dislikes, what motivates him most, and the signs he's reached his breaking point. For example:

- You know if you get him up and out the door before 9 a.m. he'll be in a great mood all morning, but if you dally and miss the window of opportunity, he'll become cranky an hour before his regular naptime.
- You know it takes her a good 15 minutes to warm up to anyone besides you and your spouse, even her beloved grandparents.
- You know how to say "no" in many different ways, because if you just came out and said it flatly, he'd double his efforts to do whatever is off limits.

- You know she'll be climbing on top of your childless friend's brand-new glass coffee table before your visit is over.
- You know he'll copy anything his 5-year-old cousin does.

You already know this and much more about your child. You're the expert. Believe it or not, these are the keys to unlock that potty-training door.

What this book does is channel that knowledge and helps you figure out what kind of approach will work best. Dr. Pete Stavinoha, a dad and pediatric neuropsychologist, will give you a peek inside your child's mind and help you potty train based on his or her individual personality. Sara Au, a mom and parenting writer, has culled together experiences from other parents across the country who are either in the midst of or have recently finished potty training their children.

We know your child is unique, special, and already has his or her own individual personality. The kinds of attempts that may have worked for your sister (or sister-in-law!), your neighbors or your friends, make you shake your head in defeat because you know those things won't work for your child. And you know what? You're probably right! Children don't all respond alike, especially when it comes to something as personal as potty training. What prods one child in the direction of the bathroom could just as often cause another to run screaming in the other direction.

Child psychiatrists Drs. Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas are frequently credited with bringing to bear modern views of temperament in children. Over the past fifty years, researchers have identified a number of characteristics that describe how children interact with the people and world around them. Whereas scientists are not in complete agreement about what to call the individual traits that make up temperament, developmental psychologists tend to agree that temperament consists of a group of brain-based, inborn characteristics that guide a person's reaction to the world and provide a basis for the development of personality. So, two children with two different temperaments may respond very differently in the very same situation—each is responding to stimuli in part according to their unique temperament.

In digesting the science of temperament for this book, we have grounded our temperament types according to several common traits

identified by researchers over the years. We've tried to break these down into commonsense temperament types that every parent will be able to recognize. Dr. Pete created five typical categories—Goal-Oriented, Sensory-Oriented, Internalizing, Impulsive, and Strong-Willed—and advises specific ways your child will best receive potty-training lessons. Keep in mind, most people have characteristics of a number of temperaments, so don't be surprised if your child shows strong elements of two or even three temperament types. This is actually pretty common and, in fact, helpful because it will mean you will have more strategies at your disposal.

We start with a short quiz to help you figure out where you are with your child and your particular situation. We've left lots of room for your notes in this section, as potty training is a very fluid (no pun intended) process. Next, we outline a number of universal strategies you can implement and steps you can take regardless of your child's personality. Some of these are very subtle changes; many involve changing your own behavior.

From there, we take you through the five different personality types and help you determine where to start with your child. Please remember, however, that these personality types are generalizations, and your child may not fall squarely in one camp or another. It may be that he or she exhibits the hallmarks of more than one type. Or, you may even see some other personality traits, latent until now, come to the surface during this profound change of life. For example, a child who is normally very laid back might decide to exercise her right to keep tight control over her own bodily functions when you try to potty train her. Often, this would be a sign she's not ready to toilet train, but sometimes it stems from an underlying strong will that as yet hadn't had a reason to show itself. In this case, while you'd originally have placed her in the Goal-Directed category, you'd now want to place her in the Strong-Willed category, and the approaches to potty training vary a great deal between the two. Since we know you are the expert here, we leave it up to you to decide which steps may resonate more fully with your individual child. We'd like you to read through the entire book before making a decision of how to begin.

Many of you may set about potty training in a very different way than you'd ever have expected before reading this book. Some of you

may have to double back and reassess the category or categories into which your child falls. But we know all of you will gain some insight into your child's mindset.

Throughout, we offer ideas for specific dialogue to use with your child. A parent's words, tone, and attitude convey strong messages to a child in training, and so we provide some of those here for you to use at home.

A couple of important notes as you read this book:

- ▶ No one can force another human being to eat, sleep, or go to the bathroom. If your child offers fierce resistance to any of our suggested tactics, back off immediately. You may need to reevaluate his or her readiness, personality type, or any outside concerns. Or perhaps you'll just need to try another of our suggested approaches. Remember, your role is to influence and manage potty training, but you cannot control it.
- ▶ To avoid sounding repetitive or wordy, we switch up our pronoun use from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph. In the sections where we discuss information specific to boys or girls, we'll clearly spell that out for you.
- ▶ There are an infinite number of factors affecting your child's interest, or non-interest, in toileting. (For example, one child was so set on imitating his dad peeing into a urinal that his mom had to first break him of the urge to spray the bathroom wall before she could get him to pee into the toilet.) We attempt to address as many as possible in this book, but by no means have we imagined every possible scenario. Take the advice in this book as a guideline, use what you like, and leave what you don't.
- ▶ Relax, you are potty training the stress-free way! We promise your child will not go off to college in diapers. She or he will learn how to go to the bathroom in a socially acceptable way. With careful, thoughtful help from you—the most important person in his/her life—they will get through this transitional period of life with flying colors!

Let's get started!

I

Identifying
Your Child's
Personality Type



In order to identify the most dominant characteristics of your child's personality, we've created a short quiz for you based on common behaviors. You already know what makes your child tick, and taking this quiz will help you channel that knowledge into the science of psychology, and from there into the best ways to potty train. By exploring kids' reactions to people and their environment, we can loosely separate them into groups with similar reactions.

In reading through the quiz, you may feel a great deal of the statements are negative in nature. You are correct. It's unfortunate, but much of what differentiates one type of personality from another is the stimuli that cause negative reactions. In order for this to seriously be useful for your family, you must answer truthfully, even if you don't like what that says about your child. We know your children are adorable, unique, sweet, loving kids. But as wonderful as every child is, there is no way around some of the negative-sounding aspects needed to categorize them for the purposes of this book. Grouping them is what will help you determine the best way to begin potty training. Don't worry that this means the personality types themselves are negative. They are not.

So before you jump into the meat of the book, go through this short quiz and rank each of the statements in order of how often they describe your child's conduct. Add up the scores and the highest number will show your child's most dominant trait or traits.

Each parent should take this quiz separately and you can then compare answers. Because each child at any given moment responds to whatever set of stimuli is in front of them, they may display character traits to Mom differently than to Dad. Evaluating any overlap or difference of opinion is a terrific way to create a thoughtful, planned approach to potty training. And remember, it is perfectly normal for many children to fall into two, sometimes even three, different groups, and in these cases you should combine the advice in each of those chapters.

After the personality quiz for your child, there is a series of thought-provoking parenting questions we urge you to consider about yourself before beginning to toilet train. These will give you clues into your own temperament and also help you frame your potty-training techniques.

Quiz

Rate the following statements according to how true they are about your child. Once finished, add up the total points for each group. A score of 24 or above indicates a dominant trait or traits, although secondary or tertiary traits with a score of 22–23 should be kept in the back of your mind.

Rating Scale

- 1 = This is rarely or never true about my child.
- 2 = This is sometimes true about my child.
- 3 = This is often true about my child.
- 4 = This is nearly always true about my child.

GROUP A

- My child is bothered by tags in clothes, hates elastic waistbands, and is irritated by certain fabrics. _____
- My child startles a great deal at loud noises like the vacuum cleaner, lawn equipment, or even a door slamming. _____
- My child seems overstimulated in crowds to the point that we simply don't take him/her out to big events much at all. _____
- My child seems to refuse certain foods based on texture or smell. _____
- My child has an intense reaction when her/his hands are dirty or wet. _____
- If I don't get the bathwater temperature just right, my child strongly resists getting into the tub. _____
- Total** _____

STRESS-FREE POTTY TRAINING

- As a parent, I am always worried about my child's comfort because she/he falls apart when she/he is the least bit uncomfortable. _____
- My child backs away from attempts at physical affection like hugs and kisses from anyone outside our immediate family. _____
- Total** _____

GROUP B

- My child just doesn't get into things the way other kids do; baby-proofing the house was almost unnecessary. _____
- My child clings to me more than my friends' kids of the same age seem to do, and gets intensely upset if I try to leave him/her alone for a moment with someone else like a babysitter or even Grandma. _____
- When we go places or meet friends out, my child seems to get even more clingy and shy. I don't think this is simply the stranger anxiety that is common in babies because these are people we see frequently enough for him/her to know them. _____
- My child seems afraid of lots of things (even imagining complex fears that seem to come from nowhere), and this is especially true at bedtime. _____
- My child seems unsure of him/herself in any new situation. It takes him/her a really long time to warm up and get comfortable. _____
- Rather than jump into a new activity, my child likes to watch for a long time. She/he also needs some prodding to join in with the group. _____
- If I say "no" to my child or set a limit, he/she immediately becomes upset and seems to retreat into him or herself. _____
- Once my child is upset, she/he can't seem to move beyond it for a while. She/he stays sad or pouts for a really long time. _____
- Total** _____

GROUP C

- My child usually sticks with an activity for a while before she/he moves on to the next activity. _____

- My child isn't distracted easily from a task and likes to finish things once she/he has started. _____
 - My child really enjoys when she/he has something tangible at the end of a project (like a painting, drawing, or stack of blocks). _____
 - My child is usually good about following directions. _____
 - My child asks questions about how to do something, and asks for help when she/he needs it. _____
 - My child does not ask me to do things for him/her; is fine doing things independently. _____
 - My child doesn't refuse my offer to help though, and likes it when we work together on a project. _____
 - My child likes to show me what he/she has done after finishing something and seems to take real pride in his/her accomplishment. _____
- Total** _____

GROUP D

- My child really likes to be independent, and he/she is very resistant to anyone helping him/her. In fact, if I try to help, he/she usually gets mad at me. _____
- My child can be very stubborn. If something is her/his idea, she/he really works hard. If it is my idea, there is almost nothing I can do to get her/him to do it. _____
- My child has no problem telling me "no," and she/he can be defiant and resistant. _____
- My child tends to get angry quickly, and when she/he is angry it seems like the emotion is really intense. _____
- When I set a limit or say "no" to my child, she/he gets angry and tantrums or broods for a long time after. _____
- My child's tantrums can last for more than 15 or even 30 minutes at a time, and there is little that I can do to shorten them. _____
- When I try to finesse my child into doing something she/he does not want to do by prompting or cajoling, the more vocal and louder my child gets in resisting me. _____