



Using the Potty and Weaning from the Bottle

It is natural to ask, “When do I start potty training my child?” and “When should I take away the pacifier or bottle?” It is really much less your responsibility than you probably think—or than others around you, such as grandparents and friends, seem to think.

Did you have to teach your child to walk? Of course not. Your child sat up, crawled, pulled himself up, let go and finally walked, all by himself, driven by an inner motivation. You provided support. You held him up; you encouraged him; you cheered and rejoiced with him. You didn’t punish him when he fell down or failed momentarily somewhere along the way. That would

have hurt his feelings and wouldn’t have helped. By the same token, you didn’t think it was your role to teach him how to do it, did you? You probably would have looked pretty silly standing by him and saying, “Look, lean on one foot and lift the other!”

It is the same with talking. He watched and listened and figured it out on his own—thanks to his own internal wiring that he was born with. You helped by speaking slowly and distinctly. You encouraged him, smiled, responded and were upbeat. He picked up things from his environment and built from there.

The processes of weaning and toilet training are similar to learning to walk and talk. Children will learn these developmental steps at their own speed. Just as he didn’t want to crawl forever, he most likely won’t take his bottle to kindergarten.

There is a reason he still wants his bottle; maybe it comforts him. Why should we interfere

with that? We might as well let him decide when he doesn’t need it anymore. What is the hurry?

Here is an example from our practice: One day one of our patients walked over to the waste basket, threw the bottle in it and said, “Goodbye, bottle.”

The same argument can be made for potty training. They are ready when they are ready. It is healthiest to let them set the pace. After all, they know what the story is. They know what we do with our pee and our poop; and they will want to copy us in this as in all things, eventually. So our role should be to let them know what we generally do and to praise them and encourage them at steps along the way. (“You have poop in your diaper? Good! Thanks for telling me.”) It might take a little longer this way, but it is healthier to let them be in control of these intimate functions. The only way you can really go wrong in potty training is to intervene too much, so they feel they are being invaded.

Ultimately, you have a lot to gain by approaching things this way. These are developmental steps. There are a lot of these in life. If we let our kids experience the motivation themselves, sense their own inner readiness and develop the courage to act on their own in these early developmental stages, they will remember the lesson for a long time. In the future, these experiences will act as precedents for them. When the time comes for future developments, they will look to themselves to accomplish it, rather than waiting until Mom or Dad says it is time. They will develop self-confidence and inner direction from the early support and confidence you showed in them. This is how most of us want our kids to turn out.

