

But as my twins approached 4 and were still showing no signs of ever wanting to go diaper-free, I realized my laissez-faire approach was not working. I needed help. So I consulted with Jean Kunhardt, a founding director of the Soho Parenting Center in New York City. She had led a mother's group I attended when my boys were just 2, and like many overwhelmed moms, I considered her a parenting guru. Kunhardt assured me that dealing with a child who is fast approaching 4 and really digging in his heels about getting out of diapers is becoming increasingly common. Although she believes that resistance can sometimes indicate a more deeply rooted issue, she has noticed that a shift in parenting style may also be part of the problem. "Because parents have become so sensitive to the pitfalls of potty training, and the fact that problems can arise from pushing a child too hard, they are sending their kids a wishy-washy message," she says. "If you back off every time they show any ambivalence, it leaves kids with more control than they can handle."

Listening to her, I knew the potty wars had to end. That day, Kunhardt gave me the advice that she gives other families with older children resisting the potty, words that changed everything.



IT'S NORMAL FOR KIDS TO BE EXCITED ABOUT THE POTTY ONE DAY AND AMBIVALENT THE NEXT.

"Look at a calendar and pick a date to say goodbye to diapers. Kindly lay down the law and put up with the protests and mess until the twins see that there is no other way except to use the toilet."

I timed our farewell to take place in the beginning of summer, just after preschool was over for the year. The kids could spend time outside naked while they got the hang of not wearing dia-

pers, and accidents would be easier to deal with. Two weeks in advance, I started telling them about the big day. They didn't protest—but they also didn't take me seriously. After all, they had heard it all before only six months earlier.

But this time I was really serious—there would be no going back. On a bright and sunny June day, with my newly found resolve and bucketful of cleaning supplies, we finally said so long to diapers. It's not like everything went smoothly. It was hit and miss at first—sometimes they made it to the potty, sometimes they didn't. As in the past, their accidents

were often due to their tendency to get so caught up in their games that they didn't want to stop to pee. Other times they went in their pants on purpose, in what seemed a form of protest. Instead of caving and letting them go back to diapers, I quickly cleaned up the mess and moved on. With no yelling from me or crying from them, I remained calm, always reminding myself that we were in this for the long haul.

So how did it all work out? If only I could have traded in all the books and treats, power struggles, and worrying for the confidence to know that when we were all ready—myself included—my sons would master the potty. For as I was promised, after one week of intense effort, three months before their fourth birthday, and years before their high school graduation, my boys were out of their diapers. And we have never, knock on wood, looked back. *

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HEADING OFF PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY START

Here are potty-training tips from Jean Kunhardt, founding director of the Soho Parenting

Center in New York City. For young toddlers, she recommends doing little more than introducing the potty, providing some potty-themed books and videos, and establishing routines such as naked time in the morning or afternoon. "There's no need for stickers, candy or other bribes. Mastery will be reward enough, as well as your tempered pleasure in his success." She says that it's normal for a child to be motivated and excited by his attempts one day and stubbornly refuse the next. "It is your job to keep exuding confidence and patience in equal measure." If

you're potty training a young toddler and he balks, it's fine to put it on hold and pick it up when he next shows interest. "But if this isn't your first go-round and your child's approaching 3 and resisting, try to be matter-of-fact and convey that 'when you're ready, you'll want to do this.'" If he's uncooperative, give him a countdown by telling him he can hold onto his diapers for another month, then go cold turkey.



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