



On Potty Training



To potty train or not to potty train. That, my fellow moms, is *the* question. Psychologists and childrearing experts tell us we mustn't rush our little ones into the scary adult world of the giant white porcelain abyss that steals away the very substances our toddlers have so proudly produced. We should wait ever so patiently until they are good and ready before proceeding with this potentially life-altering process. So how do we know when that perfect, magical moment called "ready" arrives? And here's a frightening thought . . . what if it *never* does?

Perhaps I didn't burp them enough as babies or I fastened their diapers too snugly or I used the snot-sucker a bit too vigorously. Obviously, I had

inadvertently committed some horrible act that stunted their development because never once did I pick up on any discernible signals that these kids were “ready.” I grew weary of waiting. Somewhere along the way, I experienced a profound epiphany—I was ready and that was enough.

Determined to meet with swift and sure success in this task of housebreaking (I mean potty training), I bought a book that promised to teach me how to have my child in big-boy underwear by the next day. He was. Wet, poopy big-boy underwear, but underwear nevertheless. Not even Ninja Turtle skivvies were motivation enough to get him to the toilet on a regular basis.

You’re probably thinking, “The poor baby was probably just too young!” Think again. With kindergarten looming just over the horizon, I was haunted by visions of sending him off to school with a Cat-in-the-Hat backpack full of diapers and cash incentives for the teacher to ensure her cooperation. Eventually, they’d have to invent a whole new line of diapers just for my family: Smart Didys—The Diapers That Grow with Your Academic Career.

After several failed attempts, at last in desperation I stumbled upon the method that ultimately worked for all three of my boys. I told them, “Hey,

you're three-and-a-half. Stop going to the bathroom in your pants." No M&Ms, no jelly beans, no trips to the toy store. Just a few sincere reprimands and time-outs, and the Ninja Turtles found a dry home at last.

Now the horrifying thought occurs to me—what if they really weren't ready? Should I have waited until they approached me and said, "Mom, I'm graduating from elementary school tomorrow. I think I'd like to try big-boy underwear now"? I pray that I didn't harm their delicate psyches and that I won't someday turn on Jerry Springer and see my sons lamenting their tormented, lost childhoods because their mother made them sit on the giant porcelain abyss before they were ready. Oh, well. At least they'll be wearing big-boy underwear, and for that their wives will thank me.

Life is like potty training. We are faced with choices to grow and change all the time. Most of the time, it's much more comfortable to stay in our diapers, so to speak. It's easier to stick with something we know, something old and familiar, than to move on to something new and different, an unknown. The reality is, change is the nature of life. From the moment we're conceived until the moment we die, everything about us is in a constant state of change—

the number of neural connections in our brains, our physical capabilities, our ideas and ways of negotiating life, the circumstances surrounding us.

Change can be a rewarding experience if we are willing to step forward with open arms to welcome the new possibilities before us. If Columbus had decided to stick with the safe Eastern route to India, imagine how differently history might have played out. Had Howard Schultz stayed in his safe job at a small coffee company instead of moving forward to something new and different, we wouldn't have Starbucks. And because Ann Moore was willing to embrace the possibility of change, moms the world over can enjoy hands-free shopping, courtesy of Ann's ingeniously designed Snugli baby carrier.

Is there an area of your life in which you're resisting change? Maybe you're torn between staying anchored in familiar waters and launching out into new ways of thinking or being. Picture the change before you as a door of opportunity just begging to be opened. Maybe that magical moment called "ready" has arrived. Embrace the change and see what happens. Bye-bye diapers. Hello big-girl underwear!



On Binkies



Where do binkies go to hide? No matter how large my stockpile, the day inevitably arrives when only one lone pacifier remains, and it's playing hide-and-seek. It's naptime. Life as we know it is suspended as every member of the household is commissioned in the search-and-rescue operation, signaled by the frantic call, "Where's the binky?!"

Who in the world thought of sticking a nipple on a handle to try to soothe a crying baby? I have a theory. Years ago, some exhausted nursing mom willing to do anything for a moment's peace mused, "I'll bet if I removed my nipple and let the baby suck on it for a while, I could catch a couple winks." To which her terrified husband, fearing she just may

attempt to test her assumption, instantly responded, “Oh, honey, please don’t do that! I’ve got just the thing.”

Off he raced to his workbench where he snipped and twisted and hammered and glued. Back in a flash he flew and presented his grateful wife with the world’s first “nipple on a ring,” as he called it. Though the name and appearance have been refined, the end result is the same.

I realize it’s not always politically (or perhaps I should say parentally) correct to admit to using a binky. I don’t care. I’ve used them for four kids, and not one of those kids has gone off to kindergarten sporting a plug. They do not look like Mr. Ed and don’t seem to be suffering any psychological damage, though undoubtedly some well-meaning professional will presently announce an insidious new malady plaguing our upcoming generations: pacifier dependence residual disorder.

The other evening, I took the kids out to a local family-owned restaurant for dinner since Dad was out of town. Fun was had by all, a mess made by most, but I didn’t have to clean it up. So it was a good night. Upon arriving home, I carried Charli upstairs, ready to tuck her in beddie-bye and have a little quiet time to curl up with a book and a beverage, only to

discover much to my horror that the last precious binky was missing!

The signal was given. The search was on. We searched the stroller, but no binky. We hunted throughout the house, no binky. We inspected all the usual depositories where previous runaway pacifiers had been located. Still no binky. For those of you who are politically correct and *cannot* relate to my panic-stricken state, replace the word *binky* with *blanky* or *lovey* or whatever item your child has adopted as a comfort mechanism. Yep, you get it now. It's missing, it's bedtime, and as we say in the South, "This dog ain't gonna hunt."

Having turned up empty-handed at home, I hopped in the car and drove back to the restaurant. Barefoot, out of breath, and wearing a look of sheer desperation, I accosted the owner-manager of San Giovanni's Restaurant: "Sir, I was here earlier tonight and I think I left *the* binky." This was obviously a man who had kids. Like Dan Rather with a breaking-news bulletin, he announced, "We have a mom here who's lost a pacifier, and it's bedtime." People shot knowing glances my way and immediately began checking beneath and on tops of tables with such fervency you'd have thought the Hope

Diamond was lurking behind the next ketchup bottle. No luck.

That dear, dear man marched to the back of the restaurant where his large Italian family was enjoying their nightly dinner gathering and made the appeal: “Does anyone have a binky we can give this young lady?” Lo and behold, his daughter-in-law reached into her diaper bag and produced a brand new binky, never before used, and presented it to me—a gift wrapped in empathy only a fellow mom can truly impart. God bless you, Mr. San Giovanni.

Binkies are a gift from heaven in my estimation. My kids all loved their binkies. Those priceless nipples on rings represented comfort and security for my little ones.

Do you have a binky? Is there something you keep just for yourself because you love it? Something that you enjoy, that brings comfort and security to you? It’s so easy to get lost in the all-encompassing role of motherhood. But consider this. Before you were a mom, you were a woman. What does that woman love to do?

I love reading. If I have a book, I’m happy. The only time I had to curb my love for reading was

when I had newborns, but even then I soon learned that during feedings I could prop up a book on the nursing pillow and enjoy sometimes a whole chapter per meal!

Do you love to paint? My neighbor hired a sitter for a day so she could spend some time with her brushes and canvas. Maybe coffee with friends is what keeps you afloat. Tuck the little ones in bed, put dad in charge for the rest of the evening, and make a run for the coffee shop. I have a friend who, whenever her husband is out of town for a few days, hires a sitter one evening so she can go out with friends or shopping or whatever suits her fancy at the time. Are you a scrapbooking addict like me? Put a date on the calendar once a month to spend an evening cropping with your fellow photo junkies.

What energizes you? It's worth a little planning and effort to make sure whatever that is maintains a place in your life. When you take care of yourself, you have more to give to your spouse, and you set a good example for your children. Psychologists Henry Cloud and John Townsend, in their book *Boundaries with Kids*, agree. They say, "Kids with parents who have a life learn both that they aren't the center of the universe and that they can be free to pursue

their own dreams.” Turns out that nurturing yourself as a person yields benefits all around.

Is it hiding under the crib? Maybe peeking from behind the toy box? Unlike the pacifiers that eventually lose their beloved places in our kids’ hearts (and mouths), there are some things we never outgrow. Taking time for the endeavors that nourish us as women is one of those things. So come on now. Where’s *your* binky?