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## Later Potty Training Spells Trouble for Children, Parents and Environment

*Americans potty training far later than any other country, a detrimental trend one program aims to change.*

[March 25, 2008]

Potty training in the United States is being completed later and later due in large part to the convenience of the disposable diaper—which now comes in sizes large enough to accommodate 5- to 6-year-old children. The problem with this trend is that later training is more difficult for parents, creates emotional and health problems for children, and contributes billions of pounds of unnecessary diapers to our landfills. By bringing the power of their best-selling Baby Signs® Program to potty training, developmental psychologists Dr. Linda Acredolo and Dr. Susan Goodwyn are endeavoring to reverse this trend with a innovative new approach that makes it not only possible, but fun and easy, to both start and finish potty training before age 2.

### Startling Trend Toward Later Training

Up until the 1960s, 95% percent of all children were potty trained by the age of 18 months. Since the advent of the disposable diaper, the average age of potty training in the United States has risen to 37 months—an all-time historical high. This age is more than double the average age of toilet training in almost 50 countries worldwide. Moreover, the trend toward later potty training is likely to continue given the recent release of a size 7 diaper for children over 40 pounds, the average weight of a 5- to 6-year-old.

### Later Training Is Problematic for Parents and Children

Since the 1960s, diaper companies have actively promoted a “modern approach” to potty training in which parents are advised to wait until their child is “ready”—sometime after age 2—to start training. This advice implies that later potty training will be easier, with children practically training themselves. In truth, potty training after 2 is actually more difficult. Why? Because, as the term “the terrible twos” implies, this is an age when children begin to say “No!” to everything. As a result, potty training all too often becomes a battle of wills, especially because eliminating in a diaper has become a well-ingrained habit that’s hard to break and also because parents, frantic over looming preschool deadlines, frequently resort to pressure tactics. There are other consequences of late training as well, according to Dr. Goodwyn. “After age 2, children develop the ability to experience shame and embarrassment about bodily functions which can lead to additional problems, such as low self-esteem and stool-withholding, a tendency that can result in chronic constipation.”

### Later Training Is Bad for the Environment

Later potty training also results in many more diapers in our landfills—approximately 2,000 more per child per year. And while some parents believe that changing to cloth diapers alleviates the negative impact on the environment, many experts cite serious concerns about the increased use of energy, water and chemicals required for laundering cloth diapers.

### New Approach Aims to Reverse Trend

Concerned about the detrimental effects of later and later potty training, Dr. Goodwyn and her research partner, Dr. Acredolo, began a 2-year investigation of potty training practices and concluded that the ideal age for potty training is between 12 and 24 months. “Because this is a time when verbal language is limited and because effective communication is important to successful potty training, we saw a natural role for our bestselling Baby Signs® Program,” says Dr. Acredolo. “By using a few simple potty-time signs, babies can easily tell their parents they need to go potty even before they can talk.” Acredolo and Goodwyn’s *Potty Training Made Easy with the Baby Signs® Program* is an innovative approach that makes it not only possible, but easy, for parents to start and finish potty training their child by age 2.

The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program has been field tested by parents with children from 9 months to 4 years across the country with great success. Jennifer Macris, a mother of 5 who used the program says “I potty trained my four older children before using this program with my youngest son, and I can definitely say that this is the most fun and effective program out there. It works.”

About Dr. Acredolo and Dr. Goodwyn

Linda Acredolo, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Davis. Susan Goodwyn, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at California State University, Stanislaus. Together, they have co-authored research articles in leading child development journals and have written three best-selling books for parents: *Baby Signs*, *Baby Minds*, and *Baby Hearts*.

### About the Baby Signs® Program

The Baby Signs® Program is the world's leading sign language program for hearing babies. Built upon two decades of research conducted by Dr. Acredolo and Dr. Goodwyn, much of it funded by the National Institutes of Health, the program helps babies use simple signs to communicate before they can talk, thereby decreasing frustration, enriching the parent-child bond, fostering both emotional and intellectual development—and helping babies talk sooner.

###

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# Potty Training Made Easy™ with the Baby Signs® Program



www.babysigns.com

## PRODUCT KIT DESCRIPTION



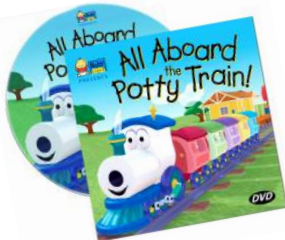
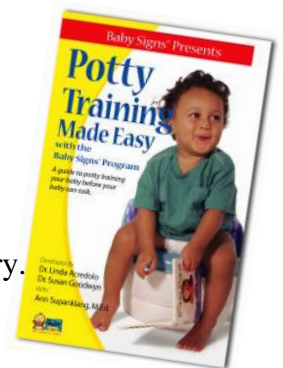
Everything you and your baby need to make potty training fun and easy!



Kit includes 5 exciting products:

### ***A Parent's Guide to Potty Training Made Easy with the Baby Signs® Program***

This straightforward parent guide from trusted child development experts will help you confidently lead your baby to potty success. Includes illustrated Signing Glossary.

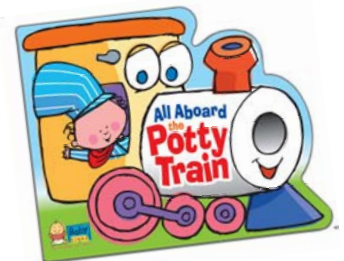


### ***All Aboard the Potty Train DVD***

With its catchy tunes, delightful animation and real kids, this exciting DVD will teach your baby five potty-time signs and reinforce each step of the potty routine.

### ***All Aboard the Potty Train Lift-the-Flap Book***

Your baby will love discovering the potty-time signs hidden under each flap in this fun and interactive board book featuring the DiaperDoodles™.



### ***Job Well Done! Stickers***

These colorful reward stickers feature fun images and positive messages such as "Good Job!", "I'm on the Potty Train!" and "I Rode the Potty Train!"

### ***All Aboard the Potty Train Conductor's Whistle***

Whether to signal it's time to go potty or to "sound the trumpet of success," this fun-to-blow whistle will put a smile on your baby's face when it's potty time.



**Retail Price \$39.95**

# Potty Training Made Easy™ with the Baby Signs® Program



www.babysigns.com

## TESTIMONIALS

*Families across the country are successfully using the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program. Here's a representative sample of the many, many testimonials we have received.*

We are definitely on board the Potty Train! My 17-month-old son cannot get enough of the DVD. We watch it once a day and he always wants to go try right after it's over. I've potty trained my four children before him and I can definitely say this is the most enjoyable, fun program out there! We have train whistles in each bathroom and my son loves to celebrate not just his bathroom successes, but everyone else's too! The whole family is on board the Potty Train! Thanks for a great product.

*Jennifer in MD*

My 9-month-old son, Ashton, has been making the "potty" sign for several weeks and now he's successfully pooping and peeing in the potty. He's also using the "more" and "all done" signs. We are so excited! We love the Potty Training Kit.

*Deanna in KY*

I've been potty training my daughter for a few months and she totally lost interest in it. Now that we have the *All Aboard the Potty Train* DVD, she actually RUNS to the bathroom when I blow the whistle and say "It's potty time!"

*Lisa in CA*

My daughter is 20 months old. When she saw the DVD for the first time, she loved it. I think she was excited to see other babies signing and going potty too. About 10 minutes into the DVD, she said "potty." We ran to the bathroom and she did it! She went potty! Since then, she's been staying dry all day. I attribute her success to the DVD – she even has to say "boop" when she slides down off the toilet, like the babies in the DVD do.

*Tammy in MI*

My 18-month-old daughter and I have been watching the Potty Train DVD for a few days now and she loves it! She is even signing "potty" to her potty chair and when we walk past the bathroom door. She even brings me the DVD after her afternoon nap. I think this is a great tool for potty training.

*Michelle in WI*

My son, BJ, is 19 months and we've only been using the Baby Signs® Potty Training Kit for a little over a week. This morning, BJ and I were watching the Potty Train DVD and all of a sudden, he pointed to the TV. I asked if he needed to go potty. He smiled, led me to the bathroom and sat on the potty. He sat for a few minutes and then signed all done. Now BJ loves sitting on the potty and trying to blow the train whistle.

*Jenny in VA*

We were ready to give up on potty training. But thanks to the *All Aboard the Potty Train* DVD, my son says "toot, toot!" and off to the potty he goes! When he's all done, he washes up and blows his whistle loud and proud.

*Sabrina in SD*

# Potty Training Made Easy™ with the Baby Signs® Program



www.babysigns.com

## CONTACTS

### Media Contact

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### Parent Contacts

The following are parents who participated in the national field testing for the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program. Some of the field testers are currently Baby Signs® Independent Certified Instructors.

**Jenny Corrado**, Herndon, VA  
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(703) 430-2661  
Boy, started program @ 18 months

**Lena Davis**, Fontana, CA  
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(909) 349-7528  
Boy, started program @ 19 months

**Deanna Pawlak**, Wilder, KY  
dpawlak@fuse.net  
(859) 291-4911  
Boy, started program @ 9 months

**Jennifer Macris**, Annapolis, MD  
jmacris@hotmail.com  
(410) 693-6912  
Boy, started program @ 17 months

**Laura Souza**, Vacaville, CA  
signbabysigns@yahoo.com  
(707) 449-3887  
(707) 301-8717  
Girl, started program @ 17 months

**Heidi Trave**, Petaluma, CA  
handp@pon.net  
(707) 762-6561  
(707) 773-2859  
Girl, started program @ 13 months



## FACT SHEET

### The Problem with Potty Training Today

Believe it or not, the average age at which American parents potty train their babies is higher than at any time in history – 37 to 38 months. And that is just the *average* – many 3½ and even 4-year-olds are still in diapers. Why? Because parents today have been led to believe that it is easier and healthier to potty train their babies if they wait until their child is *ready* – typically age 2½ to 3, or even later.

Until the late 1950s, American children were potty trained by 12 to 18 months. Why the dramatic change over the last 50 years? The answer is simple: The introduction of the disposable diaper in the early 1960s made it possible for parents to avoid the more labor-intensive cloth diaper – and in doing so, removed a major incentive to complete potty training as soon as possible. At the same time, diaper companies actively promoted a “modern approach” to potty training whereby parents were advised to wait to start training until their child was “ready” – with readiness defined as *wanting* to be trained and *being able to communicate effectively*. And now, with the creation of Size 7 diapers for children over 41 pounds, parents are beginning to postpone potty training even longer. The results of these changes are higher frustration levels for parents and children – as well as higher profits for the diaper companies.

The fact is that both historical and cross-cultural data indicate that children train when parents *expect* them to train. Even the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) agrees that the trend towards later and later training is result of parental expectations rather than necessity:

“The truth is that most popular assumptions about the best age to toilet-train – in this and most other countries – depend more on the adults’ needs, desires, and cultural attitudes than on a typical child’s readiness to control her bodily functions.” (AAP *Guide to Toilet Training*, 2003, p. 6)

### The Big Myth About Late Training

Today’s parents have been led to believe, mistakenly, that older children are easier to train than younger children. Unfortunately, by following the advice to postpone training, parents are unknowingly setting themselves up for unnecessary power struggles.

In reality, potty training a baby under the age of 24 months is actually *easier* than potty training an older child. Here’s what parents of 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds are up against:

- **Increased Oppositional Behavior**

Late potty training is more likely to result in a “battle of wills” between child and parent due to the rise in oppositional behavior after age 2. These are battles parents can’t win because children cannot be made to poop or pee on command. As the AAP warns, “This resistance can create more frustration and even anger on the part of the parents, whose increasingly negative responses lead to more resistance and outright rebellion in an ever-escalating cycle.” (AAP *Guide to Toilet Training*, 2003, p. 71)



- **A Well-Ingrained Habit**

The longer a habit has been in place, the harder it is to break. In the case of potty training, 3- and 4-year-olds have been going in their diapers all their lives – that’s all they know. It’s hardly surprising that there’s a reluctance to change something so fundamental.

- **The Rise of Shame and Embarrassment**

Starting about age 2, children develop the ability to feel embarrassment. Eliminating into a diaper, as they are used to doing, is a very private matter. In contrast, using the potty is not only novel, but much more public. Feelings of shame are particularly common in regards to bowel movements, with high proportions of late-trained children these days resorting to hiding when they need to go or withholding bowel movements to the point of serious constipation.

- **Development of Vivid Imaginations**

The ability to imagine things in their minds also increases dramatically after age 2, a new skill that, unfortunately, enables children to imagine scary things as well as positive things. That’s why we typically see an increase in common childhood fears among 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds – including toilet-related fears. Children who are afraid of things like the “toilet monster” or the flushing sound are, understandably, harder to persuade.

## **Emotional Consequences of Late-Training**

Late potty training can also result in long-term negative feelings. Intense power struggles, for example, can color how parents view their child in the future, thereby endangering the parent-child relationship. In addition, children who stay in diapers too long can develop feelings of shame and low self-esteem as a result of negative messages from desperate parents and mocking peers (e.g., “only *babies* wear diapers,” not “big kids”). They are also much more likely than younger children to be embarrassed by accidents.

The American Academy of Pediatrics agrees. In talking about the hazards of training older children they warn:

“A child’s ability to act on his own spurs resistance to a parent’s directions. A preschooler’s improved verbal skills allow him to argue and negotiate. His awareness of other children’s behavior may backfire if he feels ashamed of his continued diaper use. The simple force of long habit can also make it more difficult to achieve the transition out of diapers.”

—AAP *Guide to Toilet Training* (2003, p. 91)

## **The Solution: The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program**

By bringing the power of signing to the task of potty training, the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program makes it possible – and *easy* – for parents to avoid the hazards that late training engenders and complete potty training before their child’s 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Why signs? Because with the help of five simple potty-time signs, babies can reach communication readiness well before they learn to talk.





## **Advantages of the Program**

### **1. Easier For Parents**

By beginning potty training before age 2, parents are tapping into a period of development when toddlers are still relatively compliant rather than actively defiant, that is, before the proverbial “terrible twos” set in. Younger toddlers are also more content to sit still, especially when a parent is there with a book, song, or game to make the wait fun. And of course, the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program makes it easier for parents to train their babies because it gives babies a way to communicate even before they can talk. It gives them a way to *tell* parents when they have to go potty.

### **2. Fun for Babies**

The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program provides parents with the resource they need to make potty training simple *and* fun. In addition to a step-by-step guide for parents, the



Baby Signs® Potty Training Kit comes with a full set of fun and motivational products babies will love – all designed to make them eager to “get on board the Potty Train.” An illustrated board book, full-length DVD, conductor’s whistle and rewards stickers all work together to make potty time both fun and successful. Additional motivational tools are available free at [www.PottyTrainWithBabySigns.com](http://www.PottyTrainWithBabySigns.com).

### **3. Good for Babies’ Development**

The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program not only helps babies reach toileting independence earlier, it also gives them the benefits of signing. Over two decades of scientific research, much of it funded by the National Institutes of Health, has shown that the Baby Signs® Program:

- reduces frustration and aggressive behaviors
- builds trust between babies and their parents
- promotes positive emotional development
- boosts babies’ self-confidence and builds self-esteem
- helps babies learn to talk
- boosts babies’ intellectual development



### **4. Good for the Environment**

Children who are trained by age 2 will use between 1000 and 4000 fewer diapers! Here’s why that’s important:

- In the year 2006 *alone*, over 7.25 billion pounds of disposable diapers went into U.S. landfills.
- It can take up to 500 years for one disposable diaper to decompose in a landfill – if it ever does.
- Even so-called biodegradable disposables often don’t decompose in landfills as they are designed to do because they don’t receive the oxygen necessary for decomposition.

### **5. Good for Family Budgets!**

Getting their babies out of diapers by age 2 will save families money that can definitely be put to better use.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. How is the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program different from the Elimination Communication (EC) method?

The goal of EC is to potty train babies during their first 6 months by observing their body movements and facial expressions to determine their need to eliminate. Whenever the baby signals, the parent places her over the toilet and makes a “ssss” or “shshshsh” sound while she eliminates. Over time, the baby learns to associate the sound with the act of elimination. Because EC depends on parents’ consistent and immediate responses to their baby’s signals, the approach may simply not be practical for many families. The goal of the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program is to help parents potty train their babies before the age of 2. It provides a happy medium between earlier training (prior to 6 months) and later training (after age 2). It enables babies to reach “communication readiness” by using signs rather than waiting for words.

### 2. What if my child is older than 24 months? Will the program still work for him?

Although designed primarily with the second year in mind, the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program is based on principles that apply no matter what the age of your child. There may well be factors, such as both parents working outside the home, individual differences in temperament or the arrival of another baby, that affect your timeline for getting started. Some parents find it convenient to start earlier than 12 months, others later than 24 months. Either is fine. The principles are the same no matter what age you get started and how fast you proceed.

### 3. My baby is 12 months and is not signing yet? Can I still use the program?

All children are different and it’s not unusual for babies to start signing at 15, even 18 months. Even if your child is not yet signing, you can start using the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program anytime. While there is no doubt that signing makes the potty training experience proceed more smoothly, the program has been designed to work whether or not a child is signing.



**4. My baby is in child care during the day. Can her caregivers use the program as well?**

The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program offers some real advantages to child care providers because babies are able to use signs to signal the need to go potty, making it easier for caregivers to respond quickly and appropriately. The most important factor for success at home and in child care is communication between you and your caregivers. Let them know what you are doing at home and provide them with information to help them do the same during the day. The program is so simple and easy, they will most likely welcome it.

**5. My daughter is 13 months old and I would like to use the program with her. My son is 3 and he's not yet potty trained. Can I use the program with both of my children at the same time?**

There are certainly advantages to training both together. For one thing, training both at the same time means you only go through the process once. Secondly, as siblings typically do, they may compete with one another, especially if they are given tangible rewards. Anything that increases motivation is a plus. They may also learn from and enjoy imitating each other. The products in the Potty Training Kit motivate children of various ages equally well.

**6. How can I learn about other families' experiences with this program?**

You can learn how the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program has worked for other parents by visiting [www.PottyTrainWithBabySigns.com](http://www.PottyTrainWithBabySigns.com) and clicking on the Success Stories page or by joining our Potty Train With Baby Signs online discussion group at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/babysigns\\_pottytraining/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/babysigns_pottytraining/).



## WHAT DOES BEING “READY” FOR POTTY TRAINING REALLY MEAN?

Parents frequently hear that it’s best to wait until a child is “ready” for potty training before beginning the process. But what exactly does the term “ready” mean? For the answer we turn to the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (AAP) *Guide to Toilet Training* (2003). According to the AAP, parents should watch for readiness in three specific developmental domains: physical, cognitive, and emotional. Let’s take a closer look at what’s required in each case.

**Physical Readiness:** To actively participate in potty training, children must be physically able to:

- Sense when they need to eliminate
- Delay elimination long enough to get to the potty
- Sit independently on a potty chair

At what age do these skills typically appear? The fact that before the invention of the disposable diaper children in the United States were routinely trained by 18 months is clear evidence that these abilities are available at least by early in the second year.

**Cognitive Readiness:** To actively participate in potty training, children must *understand* what it is they are supposed to do and be able to communicate about it. That is, be able to:

- Associate the need to eliminate with using the potty
- Understand simple instructions
- Signal an adult when they need to go

Again, the fact that children in the past were routinely trained by 18 months indicates that the first two of these abilities are both available quite early and certainly by 18 months. As for signaling an adult, that’s exactly what the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program enables them to do via the POTTY sign!

**Emotional Readiness:** Emotional readiness for potty training means a willingness to cooperate. According to the AAP, the likelihood of such cooperation increases after the first birthday with the emergence of the following:

- A desire for independence and self-mastery
- An interest in imitating others
- A desire for approval

Anything, then, that increases the willingness of toddlers to embrace potty training automatically creates the emotional readiness that the AAP says is essential. And that’s exactly what the *All Aboard the Potty Train* DVD, board book, conductor’s whistle and stickers do so well!

**Bottom line?** Parents can rest assured that, with the help of *Potty Training Made Easy with the Baby Signs® Program*, their children *will* be “ready,” willing and able to potty train.

## A COMPARISON TO INFANT POTTY TRAINING PROGRAMS

*"I. WANT. A. DIAPER," he bellowed. And then he ripped off the training pants, waved them over his head, and stamped his hobbit-like feet. "DIAPER! DIAPER! DIAPER!"*

(Blog post from an exasperated mom of 3½-year-old boy)



This posting, as well as many others like it, speaks volumes about the power struggles parents and children are experiencing these days over potty training – power struggles parents can't "win." Unfortunately, potty-time battles frequently give rise to other concerns as well, such as:

- conflicts with child care providers over not "graduating" untrained 3-year-olds out of toddler classrooms.
- reports of stool withholding and severe constipation.
- descriptions of shame and embarrassment being experienced both by parents and their non-potty-trained preschoolers.

Welcome to the current state of potty-training affairs in the United States today. Thanks to the convenience of disposable diapers and advice from pediatricians to wait until children *ask* to be trained, the average age at which training is completed has risen to an all-time historical high (over age 3) and is continuing to climb! And no one is happy about it – including environmentalists who point in dismay to the billions of pounds of disposable diapers added to our landfills every year.

A recent trend towards infant potty training programs (such as "Elimination Communication," and the "Diaper Free Movement") reflects a growing concern among parents over the current situation. Such programs, however, just don't seem practical to most busy American families. So what's a parent to do?

Now, thanks to the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program, a revolutionary new approach, parents and their children are having fun "climbing aboard the Potty Train" and pulling into the Potty Trained Station before age 2 – thereby avoiding the long, drawn out battle of wills that potty training has become for so many parents.

**Why the Program Works:** The Baby Signs® Potty Training Program provides a new solution – it brings the power of the Baby Signs® Program to potty training.

- It teaches potty-time signs that help babies break through the communication barrier that is thought to prevent children from being "ready" to potty train.
- It helps parents potty train their children before those "terrible twos" set in – thereby avoiding the long, drawn out battle of wills that potty training has become for so many parents in recent years.





- It includes a complete set of highly motivational products designed to get the baby *excited* about being trained, including a delightful DVD, book, and conductor's whistle – all based on the “All Aboard the Potty Train!” theme.

## How Does the Baby Signs® Program Differ from Infant Potty Training Programs?

Although the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program and infant potty training programs share an absolute conviction that waiting until the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year to initiate training is both unnecessary and harmful, they differ in fundamental ways:

- **DIFFERENT GOALS:** The main goal of infant potty training programs is to train infants within months of birth to eliminate where and when the parent chooses, a goal reached through traditional “classical conditioning” methods which train the infant’s body to automatically begin elimination when positioned over a receptacle while parents make a certain sound.



In contrast, the goal of the **Baby Signs® Potty Training Program** is to empower children between 12 and 24 months to *self-initiate* visits to the potty by using signs to communicate their need to go – a developmental advance that the AAP includes as a major goal for toilet training. In other words, rather than being simply passive participants, Baby Signs® children are learning to take an *active* role in their own training.

- **DIFFERENT METHODS:** Infant potty training programs require very careful observation of the young baby’s elimination schedule and the ability to read the baby’s physical signals so that the parent knows when to bring the baby to an appropriate receptacle.

Although learning the 12- to 24-month-old child’s schedule is helpful to parents using the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program, the focus on this older stage of development means that parents have many more strategies at their disposal (e.g., talking with their children about potty use, motivating them with the *All Aboard the Potty Train* DVD and other resources, enticing the child to the potty with songs and books, modeling toilet use, etc.).

- **DIFFERENT IMPRESSIONS:** The focus of infant potty programs on early infancy and very careful scrutiny of unconscious signals has made the process seem extremely labor intensive to parents—an impression which makes frazzled, first-year parents worry about its practicality.

In contrast, parents using the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program report that their children become so inspired by the products designed for them—the *All Aboard the Potty Train* DVD, book, conductor’s whistle, and “Good job!” stickers—that they not only learn the signs but also become enthusiastic about potty time—thereby making the potty training experience easier and more fun for everyone.



The good news, then, is that the trend towards later and later training is reversible, and with the help of the Baby Signs® Potty Training Program, we’ll soon be on our way towards healthier babies, happier families, and a better environment for everyone.