

TOILET TRAINING

GOAL

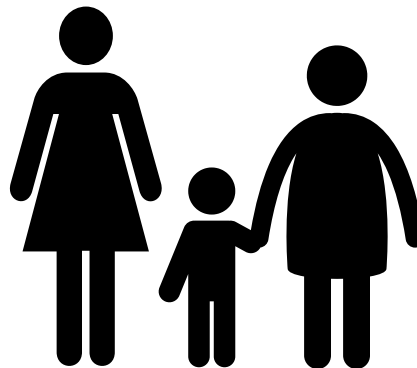
Discover the toilet training strategies that work best with children with autism.

BACKGROUND

Many autistic children learn to use the bathroom the same way that other children learn. Others need a slightly different teaching strategy. This is most often when they don't have the communication skills for us to explain what we want them to do. Often, simple strategies are effective in guiding your child to use the toilet. Although the process is simple, it's often not easy. It does require a commitment to the process.

WHEN TO GET HELP

The process used in this lesson is effective for most young children. If you have diligently followed the procedure and your child still doesn't void on the toilet or has had limited success after several weeks, consult with a professional who can help you problem solve and identify the best course of action.



- ☒ **Stays dry**
- ☒ **Shows interest**
- ☒ **Appears uncomfortable**
- ☒ **Doctor approved**

WHEN TO START

Before beginning, look for signs your child is ready for toilet training. Does he keep his diaper dry overnight or for 1-2 hours during the day? Does he show interest in the toilet? Does he seem uncomfortable when his diaper is wet? Check with your child's doctor to make sure there are no physical reasons you shouldn't start toilet training. Once you're confident your child is ready, it's time to get started.

DOES YOUR CHILD SHOW SIGN HE IS READY TO START?

COMPONENTS OF TOILET TRAINING

There are 3 main components of effectively teaching your child to use the toilet, underwear, frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet, and reinforcement. Each of these pieces is critical to your child's success.

Toilet

Frequent opportunities to sit on the toilet provide the chance for you to catch your child when he's ready to void and provide reinforcement. "Frequent" means something a little different for each child, but usually every 15-30 minutes is needed to get started, sometimes even more often than that.

When you get started, take him every 30 minutes, unless a shorter amount of time is recommended by a BCBA. If he has frequent accidents, take him more often.

Underwear vs Diapers

Diapers create a barrier to toilet training, even training pants such as Pull-ups. They prevent your child from feeling what it's like to have an accident and they prevent you from recognizing when an accident is occurring. So get rid of them while toilet training. Yes, that means a lot of laundry and potential mess so don't start toilet training until you're ready for this. Roll up the rugs and cover your couch if you can.

Commit to having your child in underwear as often as possible. This helps your child feel when he's wet. It helps you see when he's in the process of having an accident so you can immediately take him to the bathroom.

COMPONENTS OF TOILET TRAINING CONT.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement tells your child that he did what you wanted him to do. Choose a reinforcer that is highly motivating for your child that you can set aside only for toilet training.

At first, you might need to give him a reinforcer just for sitting on the toilet. That's fine, just choose something that's not quite as special as what you set aside for when he actually voids on the toilet. This might be watching a video on the phone or you reading a book or even playing in a small bin of water while he sits.

When he voids in the toilet, give him a reinforcer immediately, while he's voiding is actually best if you can get it to him in time. You need him to make the connection between voiding and the reinforcer so the longer the gap, the less likely he is to make the connection and the longer the whole process will take.

If the reinforcer is an activity like a game on the phone, let him have the phone for an amount of time that makes the most sense. If he voids just a little, maybe give him 1 minute on the phone. If he voids a lot, maybe give him 3 minutes on the phone.

Avoid letting him have the reinforcer too long. You want him to be excited to earn it again when it's time to come back to the bathroom. Keep the reinforcer in the bathroom in a place your child can see it. If he reaches or asks for it, tell him "when you pee in the potty, you can have ____."

STEPS TO TEACH

STEP 1: OPPORTUNITY

To get started, take your child to the bathroom and have him sit on the toilet. Make this as easy for your child as possible. Help him remove his clothes and put them back on when he's done. There will be time later to teach him to dress himself.

Do everything you can to make this fun and easy. It's ideal if you can encourage him to sit for a minute or 2 by singing songs or letting him watch a video, as long as the video isn't the reinforcer for voiding. Do your best to entertain him while he sits and make this a positive experience. When he indicates he's ready to get up, let him get up, even if he didn't void. Set a timer to remind you to take him back to the bathroom to try again.

STEP 2: WATCH FOR SIGNS

Allow him to do whatever he normally does, but watch for any signs that he needs to void. If he gives any indication that he might need to void, don't wait for the timer, take him back to the bathroom and encourage him to sit. If he doesn't indicate he needs to void, simply wait for the timer and take him to the bathroom when it goes off.

STEP 3: REPEAT

Repeat this process going back and forth between play and sitting at least every 15-30 minutes. When he voids on the toilet, even just a little bit, immediately give him the reinforcer you put in the bathroom for this specific purpose. As he's voiding, provide whatever praise your child enjoys. If he likes when you're loud and exuberant, go ahead and cheer for him. If he prefers when you quietly say "you did it" while rubbing his arm, do that.

WHAT TO KNOW

Accidents

If, or rather when, your child has an accident, don't make a big deal about it. Accidents are part of the process. Simply take him to the bathroom immediately and have him sit on the toilet. If he voids in the toilet, give him a reinforcer as you would any other time. Avoid the urge to reprimand him. If you feel you need to respond in some way, tell him "pee goes in the potty" or some other neutral phrase to tell him what you want him to do.

Following a schedule

As your child begins to void on the toilet on the schedule you set without accidents in between, gradually increase the time between trips to the bathroom. Generally, it's best to increase the time by small amounts, about 5 minutes, at a time. Continue to increase the time until you are taking him to the bathroom every 1 1/2-2 hours. The right schedule for your child is the one where he voids nearly every trip to the bathroom and stays dry in between.

Once your child reaches a comfortable toileting schedule, it's time to start gradually teaching him to dress himself and wash his own hands. Take a look at the lesson on using task analysis to teach skills for a more detailed process for teaching these skills. Only after he can complete the whole process from beginning to end should you start teaching him to ask to use the bathroom.

TIPS

Although the process is somewhat simple, it's not easy and can feel frustrating for everyone. Here are some tips to help the process go more smoothly

- ✓ Choose a time when your child can be in fewer clothes such as the summer when it's warm.
- ✓ Pick a time when you have fewer obligations and can devote time to the process.
- ✓ If your child is in school, it's best to start when he doesn't have school such as during a vacation or over the summer.
- ✓ If you're not seeing progress, try offering a different reinforcer.
- ✓ Increasing your child's fluid intake will provide more opportunities for him to need to void.
- ✓ Don't force fluids, but make sure he has fluids available as often as possible.
- ✓ If your child still isn't making progress, it might be time to consider whether he's truly ready. He should be able to keep a diaper dry for at least 1-2 hours and be willing to sit on the toilet. If he's not ready, consider waiting a few months and trying again.

LIST CONSIDERATIONS FOR BEGINNING TOILET TRAINING:

