

Toilet Training

Advice for Parents of Children with Autism



Teaching your child to use the toilet is not always easy, whether they are on the autism spectrum or not. But if your child is autistic, the process of toilet training can start later and take longer. As with any child, toilet training needs to happen when your child is ready and relaxed with the process.

Using the toilet independently is what you want for your child but this may take a long time with lots of small steps along the way. For a child with autism toilet training is not just about physical aspects as social factors can also be a considerable issue. Autistic children tend not to have the social impulse to want to be like others and use the toilet. Your child might not see the point of using the toilet and may prefer to continue to use a nappy.

When Should We Start?

As with any child, there is no point starting until your child is ready and beginning to recognise that they need to use the toilet. Consider:

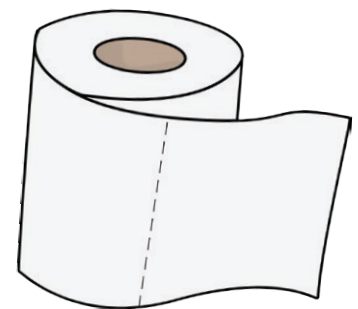
- Are they feeling uncomfortable in a full nappy?
- Have they shown interest in using the toilet?
- Do they let you know when they have urinated/defecated?

If the answer to these questions is 'yes', then they may be ready to start using a toilet.

Developing a Routine

Children with autism often benefit from routine and it's worth developing one when you start toilet training.

- Have the potty in sight early on so that your child can start to feel comfortable with it.
- Try changing your child's nappy where they can see the potty or toilet and begin to associate it with urination/defecation.
- Keep track of when your child urinates or defecates – if they have a **regular pattern** then sit them onto the potty or toilet at around that time.
- Take your child to the toilet at regular intervals during the day and ask them every so often if they need to use it.
- Use lots of **positive reinforcement** and **praise**.
- Use a **visual sequence** with an older child so that they understand what they need to do when they use the potty or toilet. Keep the sequence in the same order each time, e.g. take down your trousers; pull your pants down; sit on the toilet; use the toilet; wipe; pull your pants up; pull your trousers up; flush the toilet



Toilet or Potty?

This can depend on how old your child is and where they feel most comfortable. There needs to be a calm and relaxing environment so it could be that a younger child may feel happy sitting on a potty just outside the toilet. An older child may need to use the toilet as this is what they associate with needing to go.

Make the experience as comfortable as possible - have a footstool; a smaller training seat; a rail at the side for your child to hold onto.

Think about your child's sensory issues: Is there bleach or toilet cleaner that smells too strong? Is the light too bright? If so then make adjustments so that your child does not experience sensory overload

Your child needs to feel comfortable and relaxed enough to go to the toilet. Try having water running in the background or a toy for your child to look at or play with whilst they are on the toilet.

Other Issues

Some children like the feel of a full nappy as it satisfies sensory needs, which is comforting. Find a different way of meeting these needs like wrapping them in a weighted, warm blanket.

Others find defecation/urination scary as they do not know or understand what is happening, especially once a nappy has been removed. Try keeping the nappy on but cutting a hole in the bottom so that they can still feel tightness around the waist.

Try and keep things calm and normal when your child is toilet training as this will lower anxiety levels - if they are not ready then go back to nappies for a while and start again at a later date.

Remember:

You are not alone. If effective communication becomes too much of an issue, speak to your health visitor or doctor, or contact a local autism support group.

