

Toilet Training Tips for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Toilet training children with autism spectrum disorder can be challenging. To toilet train, your child must master the following steps/skills:

1. Feel the urge
2. Hold it in
3. Communicate the need
4. Get to the toilet
5. Pull down pants and underwear
6. Sit on the toilet
7. Relax
8. Urinate/defecate
9. Wipe
10. Get off the toilet
11. Pull up pants
12. Flush
13. Wash

First see what skills your child already knows, and reward the ones they learn!

Praise your child for being able to tell you when they have gone, or are about to go. Next try to get them comfortable sitting on the toilet, even when they don't have to go, and provide a reward (sticker, fun game, light-up toy kept only in the bathroom) when they have done each step successfully. Slowly add flushing, wiping, going while in the bathroom, then going while on the toilet.

Each step may take weeks to master, and you may have setbacks when your child is ill or going through a life stress.

In autism spectrum disorders, problems in toilet training arise when:

- The child has sensory sensitivities that make it difficult or uncomfortable to meet these steps - it may be harder to sense when they “have to go”
- The child cannot communicate the need to go
- The parents have higher developmental expectations than what the child can currently do
- The child has difficulty understanding language-based instructions (in which case pictures or visual schedules in the bathroom are helpful!)
- The child has difficulty transitioning from a fun activity (visual aids can be helpful)

It is also important to manage constipation with diet or medication, so that the child has soft stools that are comfortable for them to pass, and they don't try to withhold stool.

Collaborate with your child's school providers and ABA therapists, who have a lot of experience with this and may have good tips. It will help if you both use the same approach with your child and work on the same skills.

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