INFORMATION SHEET*

RRCASD: Informing Families and the Community of Autism Spectrum Resources & Services

Toilet Training in Autism*

By Suzanne Engel, Psy.D. & Caroline I. Magyar, Ph.D.
University of Rochester Medical Center

Overview

Children with autism face more challenges learning how to use the toilet than children without autism. This may be due to cognitive and language delays that can interfere with understanding the purpose of the toilet and motor planning and/or transition difficulties that can interfere with learning the sequence of steps needed to use the toilet successfully. Increasing the child’s ability to be self-sufficient in toileting is necessary to improving his/her participation in a range of social, leisure, and vocational activities; all activities associated with improved quality of life.

Various methods of toilet training have been proposed for children in general. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends a child-oriented approach. This method focuses on increasing the child’s familiarity with the toilet and its use, and seeks to increase the child’s interest and willingness to use the toilet. This is accomplished by gradually introducing the child to the toilet or potty-chair; first by bringing him/her to sit on the toilet with his/her diaper on, then with his/her diaper off, then finally encouraging him/her to urinate in the toilet. Despite the AAP’s recommendation for this approach, there is little research to indicate that it is effective for children with autism.

Perhaps the most well researched method of toilet training for individuals with a developmental disability, including autism, is the Rapid Method of Toilet Training (RTT). This method focuses on giving the child a preferred beverage and then sitting him/her on the toilet at regular intervals until he/she successfully urinates in the toilet. Once he/she urinates, the caregiver provides reinforcement and praise. Another toilet training approach that has also been researched is called the Chaining Method. This method focuses on coaching the child through the steps in the toileting routine and gradually fading the assistance as he/she becomes more independent in following the routine. Sometimes a visual schedule depicting the steps is used during training to facilitate learning the routine.

Finally, there is some research to indicate that moisture-sensitive shorts that emit a noise when the child urinates, prompting him/her to use the toilet, may also be effective for some children. The specific method of toilet training that you select for use with your child should be based on a thorough assessment of his/her physical well-being and motor planning abilities. Your child’s primary care provider and/or the professionals on your child’s school team can assist you in selecting the method that would be best for your child.

* This resource is provided for informational purposes only. Information should not be used as a substitute for professional assessment and judgment. Although the information is believed to be accurate and reliable, all information is provided “as is” without warranties of any kind, either express or implied, including but not limited to merchantability, non-infringement or fitness for a particular purpose. The University of Rochester shall not be liable for any damages, including direct, indirect, special or consequential damages, which may arise out of the use of the information contained within this resource.
Find Out More

Websites:
American Academy of Pediatrics: Guidelines for Toilet Training
http://www.aap.org/practicingsafety/Modules/ToiletTraining/ToiletTraining.pdf

Applying Structured Teaching Principles to Toilet Training
http://www.teacch.com/toilet.html

National Autistic Society: Toilet Training
http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2427&a=3366

Tips for Daily Life: Toilet Training
http://www.theautismprogram.org/toilet.asp

Books:


References:

* This resource is provided for informational purposes only. Information should not be used as a substitute for professional assessment and judgment. Although the information is believed to be accurate and reliable, all information is provided “as is” without warranties of any kind, either express or implied, including but not limited to merchantability, non-infringement or fitness for a particular purpose. The University of Rochester shall not be liable for any damages, including direct, indirect, special or consequential damages, which may arise out of the use of the information contained within this resource.