

INFORMATION SHEET*

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

*Toilet Training in Autism**

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Overview

Children with autism face more challenges learning how to use the toilet than children without autism¹. This may be due to cognitive and language delays that can interfere with understanding the purpose of the toilet¹ 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 activities²; 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 approach³. 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 toilet⁴. 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 autism³.

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)⁵. 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 praise⁶. Another toilet training approach that has also been researched is called the Chaining Method⁷. 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 routine⁷.

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 children⁸. 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.

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Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

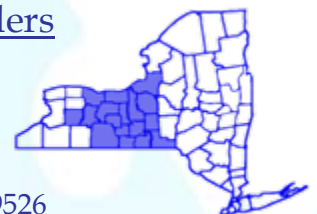
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Find Out More

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:

Azrin, N. & Foxx, R.M. (1989). *Toilet Training in Less Than a Day*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.

Coucouvannis, J.A. (2008). *The Potty Journey: A Guide to Training Children with Special Needs, Including Autism and Related Disorders*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Wheeler, M. (2007). *Toilet Training Individuals with Autism or Other Developmental Issues*. (2nd Ed.). Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

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- ¹Dalrymple, N.J., & Ruble, L.A. (1992). Toilet training and behaviors of people with autism: Parent views. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 22, 265-275.
- ²Cicero, F.R., & Pfadt, A. (2002). Investigation of a reinforcement-based toilet training procedure for children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 23, 319-331.
- ³Christophersen, E.R. (2003). The case for evidence-based toilet training. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 157, 1153-1154.
- ⁴Brazelton, T.B. (1962). A child-oriented approach to toilet training. *Pediatrics*, 29, 121-128.
- ⁵Kiddoo D, Klassen TP, Lang ME, Friesen C, Russell K, Spooner C, & Vandermeer B. (2006). *The Effectiveness of Different Methods of Toilet Training for Bowel and Bladder Control*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- ⁶Azrin, N.H., & Foxx, R.M. (1971). A rapid method of toilet training the institutionalized retarded. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 4, 89-99.
- ⁷Kroeger, K.A., & Sorensen-Burnworth, R. (2009). Toilet training individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities: A critical review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 3, 607-618.
- ⁸Azrin, N.H., Bugle, C., & O'Brien, F. (1971). Behavioral engineering: Two apparatus for toilet training retarded children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 4(3), 249-253.

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