



## Toilet Training Children with Autism and Related Conditions – Information for Parents

### INTRODUCTION

There are many different ways to toilet train and professionals do not always agree on the best method or the right time to start. However, children should be learning the skills for toilet training as a normal part of early development. If children are delayed in starting to get the skills needed for toilet training, they should be offered help with these from around their second birthday, in the same way as they are offered help for other development problems.

Children with autism may take longer than other children to learn new skills, so it is important to remain calm and consistent and ask everyone who looks after or works with your child to follow the same routines. There are some suggestions below that may help:

### ROUTINES

- If routines are important for your child, this can help with toilet training. Having a time to sit on the toilet as part of your child's daily routine is one of the first steps for toilet training. Start with a very short time once a day and gradually build the time of sitting to about one minute for each year of their age, then increase the frequency of sitting. After meals or drinks, or with nappy changes can be good times.
- Your child may need a toy, or attention from you, such as singing a song, or reading a story, to help them stay on the toilet.
- When they are sitting well, an egg timer, or something similar may help them understand how long they are expected to sit for.
- When your child is happy to sit on the toilet, knowing when your child normally wees (passes urine) and poos (opens their bowels) can help them to wee or poo on the toilet. If you check your child's nappy every hour for a few days and make a record of when they drink, and when their nappies are wet or soiled, then you will know when they are most likely to need the toilet and can take them at those times. There is a record chart available at <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Baseline-Toileting-chart.pdf> that you might find helpful.

### UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATION

- Your child may find it easier to understand what is expected of them if you use a social story about going to the toilet. (Your health visitor, school nurse or community nurse may be able to help with this.) To start with the story should be used at a time when your child is relaxed. Once they are used to the story, it can be used just before you take them to the toilet. There is a story, 'Talk about going to the toilet' available at <https://www.bbuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Talk-About-Going-to-the-Toilet.pdf>

- Try using a sequence of pictures to help your child understand what you want them to do when they get to the toilet e.g. removing clothes, sitting on the toilet, weeing or pooing on the toilet, wiping their bottom, putting toilet paper in the toilet, dressing, flushing the toilet and washing their hands. Don't forget to have a picture for the activity that will come after the toilet visit.

### **THE BATHROOM OR TOILET**

- For many children going straight to the toilet means they do not have to learn to do this when they are used to a potty. However, they need to be able to sit safely and comfortably on the toilet, so may need an insert seat and a stool for their feet.
- Some children find the bathroom frightening because of bright lights, different texture on the floor, the noise of extractor fans, or the cold toilet seat. If this is a problem for your child, try to find ways to change these e.g. a dimmer light bulb, wearing slippers or socks, turning off extractor fans, a padded toilet seat.
- If your child is easily distracted, try putting things not needed for toilet training (such as tooth brushes, tooth paste and make up) out of sight.
- If your child likes the feel of their nappy then a weighted blanket or warm hot water bottle on their lap when on the toilet might help. You could also try gradually building time in pants or gradually cutting away bits of the nappy.
- If your child struggles with balance or movement, then referral to an occupational therapist who can provide adaptations for the toilet (such as grab rails, smaller seats, steps etc) may be needed. Your health visitor or school nurse may be able to advise about this.

### **REWARDS**

- Rewards should be something your child enjoys but is easy for you to provide as soon as they have done what you have asked them to do, e.g. time on an electronic game, or a chocolate button or a sweet.
- Start by using the reward for your child sitting on the toilet, but also praise them for what they have done e.g. 'Joe, well done for sitting on the toilet'
- When your child is regularly sitting on the toilet, stop giving the reward every time, but carry on praising them. Start to use the rewards for weeing or pooing on the toilet. Tell them what you want them to do and use their picture cards to help them understand. When your child is always weeing or pooing on the toilet, stop using the rewards every time, but carry on with the praise.

### **GOING OUT**

- Some children find it hard to be able to use different toilets. Taking children to different toilets within a short time of starting to toilet train can help e.g. toilets at school, family and friend's houses. Use their picture cues to show them things that are the same as at home and to remind them of what to do.
- Public toilets can be difficult places for some children. They may find other toilets flushing, hand driers or doors banging frightening. Disabled toilets tend to be quieter and have more space. You can buy a RADAR key online to be able to use locked disabled toilets. These are available from:  
<https://crm.disabilityrightsuk.org/radar-nks-key>

- Try taking your child's picture cues and their own toilet wipes or a towel with you.

### **MAKING PROGRESS**

- When your child is using the toilet regularly when you take them, you should start to work on the next step towards independence. They will need a way to tell you when they want to go. Try having a picture card or sign that they give you when they want the toilet.
- As your child starts to tell you they want the toilet, use reminders less often. If you carry on reminding them every time, they are less likely to learn their own body signals and may have more accidents.

### **SOLVING PROBLEMS**

- Your child's health visitor, school nurse, community nurse or teacher may be able to offer support and help with toilet training, or they may be able to refer you to a local children's continence advisor, if there is one.
- Try to work out what may be causing the problem as that might help with solutions. Gradual changes to routines, rewards, and picture cues might help.
- Remember that toilet training is a developmental skill and can take time for your child to learn. Being patient, calm and consistent will help.
- There are a number of reasons why some children continue to wet or soil. It is important therefore that any child who struggles to get clean and dry undergoes an assessment. This assessment will not only help to identify if there is an underlying problem which can be treated, such as constipation, but also help inform an individualised toilet training programme.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- the Children's toilet training section of the Bladder and Bowel UK website at: [www.bbuk.org.uk](http://www.bbuk.org.uk)
- The National Autistic Society website at: <http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/understanding-behaviour/toilet-training.aspx>
- Your child's health visitor, school nurse, community nurse or teacher may be able to provide you with more help or refer your child to the local children's continence advisor if there is one.

