

TIP SHEET

Tips for Potty Training

Potty training is a milestone marking a child growing up, learning self-care skills and independence. This transition can cause stress and anxiety. Before starting to train, make sure that both child and parent are ready. Be prepared to commit to working on potty training until it is complete. The following tips can help make potty training easier for parent and child.

Beginning potty training

- Assess the child's readiness. Signs include interest in the bathroom, cooperation with basic changing tasks and feeling uncomfortable in wet or dirty diapers. (Note: for children with autism or other disabilities, chronological age is not necessarily an indicator for readiness.)
- Make sure that adults who spend time with the child are aware of the potty training and can support the efforts.
- Send extra sets of clothing to the places the child spends time (school, therapy, grandma's house, etc.) Accidents will happen, but you will be prepared when they do.
- Help the child relate toileting tasks with the bathroom by changing diapers in the bathroom.
- Have the child stand for a diaper change rather than lay down. This gives the child an active role in the process.
- Empty the child's dirty diaper into the toilet and have the child flush it.

Middle stages of potty training

- Have the child sit on the toilet, eliminating an additional transition from potty chair to toilet.
- Make sure your child is able to sit comfortably on the toilet. If necessary, use a child's seat over the regular toilet seat and a foot rest so the child does not have to balance.
- Dress the child in underwear during the day (rather than a pull-up).
- Involve the child in cleaning up accidents. Bring him/her into the bathroom to clean up.
- Develop a toileting routine by making a schedule based on when the child goes potty and other daily activities.
- Focus first on bladder control and then move on to bowel control. Recognize that bowel training can produce much more anxiety for children.
- For difficulty with bowel training, assess your child's diet. It may be necessary to alter the diet or consult a physician. Children with autism often experience limited diets and problems with their digestive systems which can make bowel training more difficult.

Final stages of potty training

- Teach the child how to communicate the need to go potty.
- Respond immediately to the request to go. Many children do not communicate the need until it is an emergency.
- When the child can communicate the steps independently, encourage him/her to access the potty by themselves.
- When entering new environments, let the child know where the bathroom is upon arriving.
- Allow children to continue using visuals for toileting even after they have mastered it.
- Bring a toileting survival kit when using public facilities. For children with autism, this may include ear plugs for loudly flushing toilets and comfort items to decrease anxiety.

These tips were compiled from a variety of sources, including Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism and Related Disorders, A Comprehensive Guide for Parents and Teachers, by Maria Wheeler, M.Ed.

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