

ELIMINATE THE BATHROOM BATTLES

Tips for toilet training your child
with autism

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Kids with autism are often great with routines. When the routines are useful, this is an incredible strength. But sometimes the routines aren't very functional, and they can be really hard to change. Your child has been using the bathroom in his diaper *since he was*

born. This is a very strong routine! Changing it can take some time and practice. Here are some tips that may help.

Help Him Connect Bathroom Waste with the Bathroom

Try changing your child's diaper in the bathroom, in front of the toilet, every time. This may be hard at first, but after some practice he is likely to adjust. You can start by changing him lying down if this is what he is used to. Over time, try to move to a standing diaper change. If there is poop, you can say, "Poop goes in the toilet!" and let him see you transfer the poop into the toilet. It's always a good idea to have him sit on the potty after taking off the soiled diaper and before putting on a clean one.

Make Little Changes

If your child isn't yet ready to sit on the potty unclothed, let him sit on the potty with his pants on at first. Eventually, see if he will sit with his diaper. Over time, you can even cut out a hole in the bottom of the diaper and let him use the potty through the hole. Slowly cut away more and more of the diaper over time until your child is ready to sit without it.

Make It Fun

Toilet training involves a whole lot of waiting. It can be difficult for kids to understand what they are supposed to do when sitting on the potty. Try offering a special toy that he only gets when sitting on the potty. A music box is a great choice; the music can even act like a timer. Or maybe your child wants to read 3 books each time he sits, or watch you blow bubbles. Some families light a candle in the bathroom, and after sitting the child blows it out as a built-in reward.





Use a Transition Object

When your child starts to connect the toy with using the potty, you can show or hand it to him and say “Potty time!”

Do this each time you take him into the bathroom for a diaper change or to sit on the potty. Over time he will learn that this means it’s time to go into the bathroom, which can reduce transition struggles. For some kids, instead of the toy you can hand him a meaningful object like a diaper, or a picture of a toilet ([if your child understands pictures](#)) each time you want him to go sit. Eventually, your child may be able to use his object or picture to tell you he needs to go.

Sit Frequently

The most effective way to schedule toileting is to track whether the diaper is dry or wet every 30 minutes for at least a few days. You’ll start to see a pattern of when he goes and can schedule sitting at those times. Many families have children sit every 30 minutes while toilet training to increase chances of a success.

Model Toileting

If you feel comfortable, let your child watch you or your partner go to the bathroom to learn about using the potty. He can also read books or watch videos about using the potty. If he does pretend play, have his dolls, stuffed animals, or favorite characters sit on the potty and make a big deal of praising the dolls. If your child has a speech therapist or occupational therapist, you can ask them to help you write a story just for your child.



Increase Feelings of Wetness

For some children, wearing wet underpants is very uncomfortable and can increase the desire to toilet train. Putting underpants under the diaper reduces the mess and can help kids who are reluctant to change the routine of wearing a diaper. Let your child pick out some underpants with his favorite characters and help him build up the excitement about wearing them.

Celebrate Small Successes

Look for any reason to praise your child's toileting successes, even if it's just sitting on the potty for a brief moment. When we pay attention to a behavior, our children tends to do it more. As your child's successes get bigger, pull out all of the stops and throw a party in a way that is meaningful to him (Bubbles! Balloons! Whatever he loves).

Use Positive Responses

It's important not to make your child feel that he's done something wrong when he has accidents or doesn't make progress. If your child wets his underpants, you can just say, very neutrally, "Oops you're wet! Time to change and clean it up." Or for poop you can say, "Oh there's poop. Poop goes in the potty! Let's go put it in." Have him help with the cleaning if he can, but don't make him feel that he is trouble. Negative emotions around toileting can lead to holding urine or feces, which is dangerous and unpleasant.

Be Patient

Toilet training can really take time, but it is worth it to go slowly. Show your child that you believe in him and that you are proud of him. Set him up with lots of opportunities for success, but avoid battles and power struggles. All you can do is give him the opportunity to learn when he is ready. If toilet training is a battle, you can let it go for a while and try again in a few months. Or seek advice and help from a therapist who understands your child and autism.



Do What Works for You and Your Child

You are the expert on your child. If some of this advice, or the advice you get from others, doesn't feel quite right for your family, you don't have to try it! Take what works for you and leave the rest. Or try it in a different way. Does your child hate being praised? By all means don't praise him!

Always trust that you are the best parent for your child, even in the face of "expert" advice.

ABOUT LEARN PLAY THRIVE, L.L.C.

I'm Meg Proctor, the founder of Learn Play Thrive. I'm an autism specialist and occupational therapist. I love helping children with autism participate more fully in their lives. But even more, I love helping parents learn practical, realistic things to try out during their daily routines. On my [website](#), I have lots of free resources for families, and a blog to help families get more from their child's therapies and their daily routines. I provide effective, convenient online occupational therapy for families in Mississippi and North Carolina.

Thanks for taking the time to read this! Your child is so lucky to have you doing the detective work to figure out how to help him or her learn and thrive.

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