

# Toilet Training

*Toilet teaching is all about teaching a new skill. Teaching new skills to children with autism spectrum disorders works best when the steps to the task are broken down into manageable pieces. Teaching must also be consistent (everywhere in and out of the home) and become predictable to the child in terms of rewards and consequences (praise, stickers, and dry pants vs. wet pants and room cleanup). In order for toilet training to be successful, the child must move from depending upon a prompt (timed trips to the bathroom) to recognizing the signs of a full bladder and taking the necessary actions him/herself.*

## **The steps needed to be learned include:**

- ☞ *Getting to the bathroom while still dry (turning on lights if needed, etc.)*
- ☞ *Taking down pants*
- ☞ *Sitting on the toilet*
- ☞ *Doing their 'business'*
- ☞ *Wiping, cleanup*
- ☞ *Pulling up pants*
- ☞ *Flushing*
- ☞ *Washing hands*
- ☞ *Leaving bathroom*

## **Some helpful things to remember when toilet training:**

- ☞ There is no place for shame, degradation or punishment. This is skills teaching, just like learning to read.
- ☞ Stay calm at all times, at least on the surface.
- ☞ Be sure they are physically and developmentally ready before you begin training.
- ☞ Teach dressing skills first, and/or dress in elastic pants so they won't risk accidents while fumbling with buttons.
- ☞ Start with urine training.
- ☞ Chart the current urination routine. How often do they go, how wet do they get, how long can they stay dry, what times of day do they generally go? Chart weekends also, and expect differences due to changes in routine.
- ☞ Do not use Pull ups or other absorbent diapers while toilet training. The child MUST feel the consequences in order to connect: full bladder = I'll be wet. They must make this connection in order to then learn: bathroom = staying dry.
- ☞ Teach the proper sequence ahead of time without skipping steps (even if they need hand-over-hand assistance for a while). Kids with autism tend to learn in chunks, so you want them to have the right chunks.
- ☞ Teach the socially acceptable rules of toileting from the start. For example, if you teach a boy to take his pants off to prevent dripping, he will continue to follow that plan well beyond the preschool years unless he is then taught a

different way. This not only requires additional teaching on the part of parents, but it is also much more difficult to 'unlearn' a learned behavior that will be considered inappropriate later on.

- Practice makes perfect – give them a chance at a lot of practice. Give them lots of fluids during the day (but not at night).
- Reinforce (reward) following procedure. The bathroom needs to be seen as a positive experience, not a negative one (i.e. punishment for non-success).
- Reinforce staying dry, not voiding. If you reinforce voiding, you risk the child frequently voiding small amounts just to obtain the reward, and you will spend hours in the bathroom on a daily basis.
- Don't wait till they are wet to take them to the bathroom, take them 15 minutes before your chart shows they are likely to need to go. You will have more success more often (hence, more practice at staying dry).
- Do not leave them on the toilet for long periods of time. If they cannot go in a short period, they have not yet made the connection of the full-bladder-feeling to voiding, and leaving them there will be unproductive (and possibly stress inducing, which leads to fear of the bathroom).
- If the child has an accident, help him/her to clean it up, and then run through the proper sequence of steps again. Do not do the cleanup yourself, since there is no negative consequence to being wet. A negative consequence is not the same as a punishment, and punishment is not appropriate for a lack of learning.
- If you do not see some success in a matter of weeks, consult a professional for advice.