

## RESOURCES

1. Maria Wheeler book: [Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism and Related Disorders](#)
2. <http://www.clothdiaper.com/PRODUCTS/DIAPER-COVERS/Get-ber-Waterproof-Pants.html>
3. <http://www.visualaidsforlearning.com/toilettraining-pack-learning.htm>
4. <http://www.childrenwithspecialneeds.com/index.php/downloads.html>
5. <http://www.ilmedico.com/g/plastic-pants/>
6. <http://www.niu.edu/ccr/resources/ToiletTraining2.pdf>
7. Autism Speaks Toilet Training ATN Guide  
[http://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/sciencedocs/atn/atn\\_air\\_p\\_toilet\\_training.pdf](http://www.autismspeaks.org/docs/sciencedocs/atn/atn_air_p_toilet_training.pdf)
8. [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism\\_spectrum\\_disorder\\_toilet\\_training.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism_spectrum_disorder_toilet_training.html)
9. Karen Krivit, LSW is an Autism Consultant at Elwyn SEEDS. She can be reached at [krivitk@elwyn.org](mailto:krivitk@elwyn.org) or [seeds.elwyn.org](http://seeds.elwyn.org)



# Toilet Training Guide for Children with Autism

By Karen Krivit



Is my child ready?  
What if my child doesn't speak?  
What if my child shows no interest?

A Step-By-Step Guide for Families

## INTRODUCTION

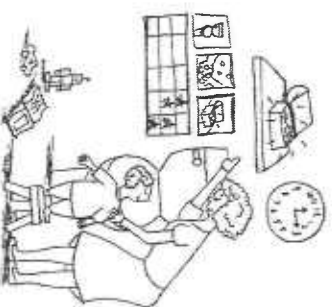
Your child does not have to tell you that he has to use the bathroom or be able to talk in order for him to be toilet trained. Children with Autism have social, language and sensory differences so traditional methods of toilet training don't always work. It is usually much harder to toilet train a child with Autism, however the longer it is put off the harder, (and messier) it will be! Before you begin it is essential to coordinate and communicate with all of the people in your child's life as well as the professionals working with him, for example the teachers, if he attends a school. In addition, we recommend you seek medical clearance from your child's physician before you start.

We use a behavior-based technique that includes the following steps.

1. Motivation
2. Observing your child's routines
3. Preparing your Environment
4. Preparing your Child
5. Getting Started/ Rewarding
6. Communication/Reinforcing

## 1 MOTIVATION

Figure out what small reward would work to motivate your child. Whatever you choose can only be used to reward successful toileting steps and should never be given to your child at any other time. Some parents create a "treasure box", others allow watching very small parts of a favorite movie, a high five, using an iPad, or getting a fake tattoo. Whatever the "reward" is, make sure it's small and very desirable to your child.



## 2 OBSERVING YOUR CHILD'S ROUTINES

Keep track of whether your child has a regular toileting schedule already by noticing how frequently she has wet diapers and whether she has regular bowel movements.

## DO'S & DON'T'S

-DON'T reinforce the tantrum: the most common problem with toilet training occurs when families put their children back and forth into pull ups and or diapers throughout the day either because your child tantrums or because it's easier for you!

-DO commit to saying "Goodbye" to diapers/pull-ups and DON'T allow your child to learn that if he fusses or makes enough of a mess you will give them the diapers back. It's very common for children with Autism to "hold out" to poop until you give them a diaper, this is only teaching them to do just that; if they can control their bowels enough to do this then they are ready for toileting, it's just a matter of helping them feel comfortable and encouraged to make the change!

-DO learn about your child's sensory and communication needs and try to remember that their whole body and mind is actually challenged by Toilet Training.

-DO remember to get support for yourself before, during and after this Toilet Training.

-DON'T assume that if you go out your child will know where and how to use the bathroom. Always orient your child to a new bathroom before he needs to "go" when you are on outings.

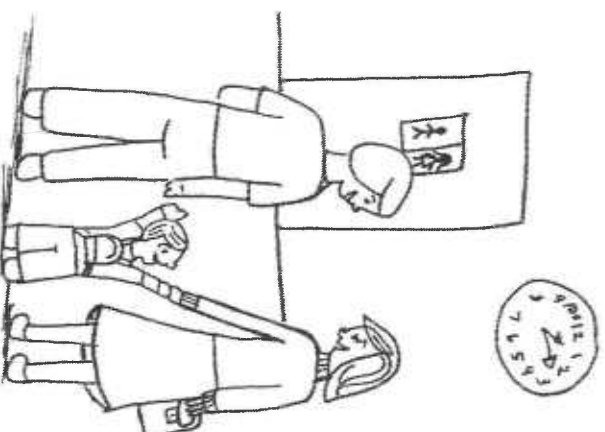
-DO remember to reward the little steps and not just the big ones.

-DO remember that if it's not working, take a break and try again in a few months.

-DON'T give up, your child is capable of many wonderful things!

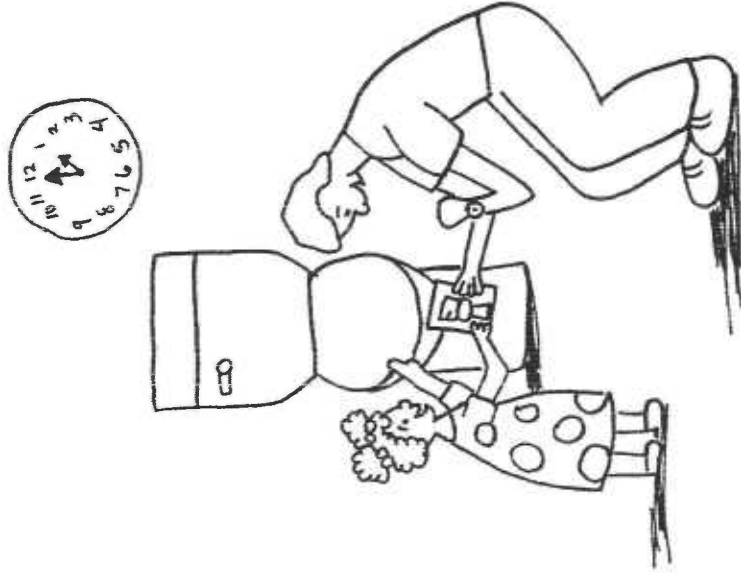
-DO remember to use words like, "It's time to try!" in a calm voice instead of saying "It's time for you to go to the bathroom."

-DO seek out professional help if you continue to have a difficult time with toilet training.



## 6 COMMUNICATION/REINFORCEMENT

Make sure to use a word/picture/or sign to communicate that your child is "going to the potty". By combining the act of peeing with the picture of the toilet your child will learn what this is called. This is very important so that your child can eventually tell others he has to use the bathroom. Also, your child may not learn to tell you that he has to go but he will learn to understand that the symbol for "bathroom" from YOU means "it's time to try to go to the toilet". Many children with Autism learn routines better if they are shown a picture of what you are talking about instead of just hearing about it.

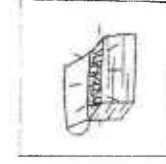
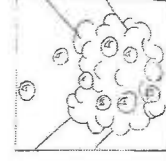
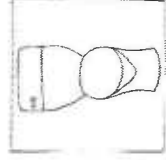


## 3 PREPARING YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Set up YOUR OWN schedule first! This will require your own emotional and time commitment: If you and your supports are determined to succeed with Toilet Training it's best to set aside and invest in a whole week where you and your supports can be completely attentive to training. If your training efforts are inconsistent, this method will not be as successful, all your efforts will be more frustrating to you and your child's diapering needs will last longer. You will need to understand that by committing to Toilet Training, you will need to commit to using only underwear during the day and no more diapers. (Yes, this will be messy at first, but not for long!) Setting up the environment: You will need underwear and, changes of clothes, including socks. Many families use plastic liners over the cloth underwear to cut down on leaks and messes. The floor will need to be easily cleaned. Many families put plastic tarps over carpeting. Many families move a number of highly desirable toys into the "training room" for this time and adults take shifts. You will need a timer that you will set and reset each time you go with your child to the bathroom to remind you that it's time to try again. You will need lots of special drinks to encourage your child to urinate frequently. You will need a step stool so that your child's feet can be firmly planted when he sits on the toilet to give him a secure feeling. Many families also use a toilet seat insert (less than \$10 at most box stores) so that the opening of the toilet is more "child sized," giving him a SAFE feeling.

## 4 PREPARING YOUR CHILD

Even if your child can talk, always use visuals such as a 1-page picture story, pictures or a very brief DVD (traditional potty books are too long). Show your child the toilet, underwear and rewards (out of reach but not out of sight) and have pictures of these that he can see while you speak very simply about what's going to happen. Remember that kids with Autism understand things that are in pictures much better than when they are spoken to with words alone. Work with your child's special education staff for help with these visual aides. Most children feel more secure when they can see a picture of what is happening versus hearing someone talk about it.

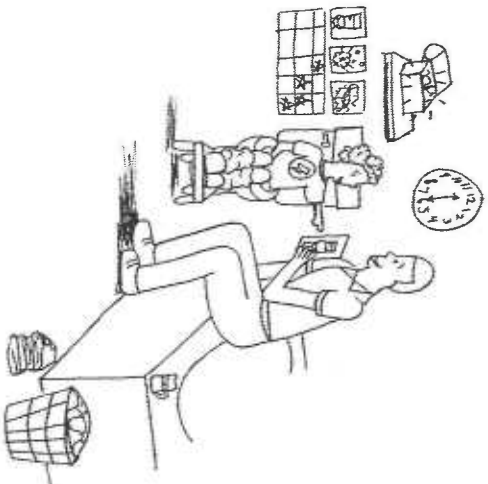


# 5 GETTING STARTED

## Step A

Start Day 1 in your Training Area by putting on special underwear and saying bye-bye to the diapers. Then have lots of special drinks, remember to make this special and fun! Next bring your child to sit on the toilet every 15 minutes for about 5 minutes if he can tolerate this. (It is too confusing for boys who are not aware of their bodies to understand when to sit and when to stand, we recommend to always have your child sit when peeing, even if he's a boy. Once he is more skilled and has control over urination, he can easily learn to stand, but this comes MUCH later).

You will need to stay with your child and read or play with him while he is sitting on the toilet to help him feel comfortable and most of all to catch him when he is peeing or pooping. (Most likely he will pee in the potty long before he will poop.) Remember that your child's Autism gives him many sensory issues. Because of this, sitting on the toilet and peeing or pooping without a diaper can feel overwhelming at times. It's important to address sensory issues during this training, so you can make this time comforting and fun for your child. Your child, most likely, will not really understand that he is peeing at first and you will need to show him when he does and immediately give him his small and special reward and then say in a calm voice, "Look, that's your pee going in the potty, good boy, you get a prize!" (The reward should be something that is short lived, and not a big toy otherwise your child will not feel any need to get another reward as he will be content to play all afternoon with this new toy).



## Step B:

Keep this "Potty Party" time going, keep the drinks going, it's very important for the ADULT to keep track of how long it's been since the child last sat on the toilet. You can NEVER rely on your child to let you know he has to pee (use a timer on your cell phone or a kitchen timer). Most children with Autism take a while to understand the connection between the feeling that their body is actually peeing to the action of seeing the pee go into the potty. This is because when children wear diapers or pull-ups they never see or feel themselves eliminating! Your job in Part B is to review the new action of peeing or pooping in the potty over and over again by helping your child sit on the potty and rewarding him for the act of eliminating. (It's not called Toilet Training for nothing!) If he begins to eliminate elsewhere (on the floor) immediately bring him (mid-pee or mid-poop) onto the potty and try to show him what he's doing. Use calm and encouraging words for jobs well done and have your child participate in the clean up and clothes changing when accidents occur. Use a neutral tone of voice during accidents and say, "No prize, lets try again!" Remember to always add hand washing into your training routine.

## Step C:

Plan adult breaks during the first few days since the amount of attention and encouragement Toilet Training requires is intense! It's important to remind yourself of the gift this skill will be for your child. Being toilet trained allows children with disabilities to be less reliant on strangers to care for their bodies, it allows them to be more able to participate in activities with peers and it allows your youngster a chance to accomplish one of the first steps of growing up, even though it might be uncomfortable and scary at first. When this becomes hard, go back and remind yourself of what's motivating you to do this for your child as it will not always be easy or fun for either of you! Remember: what will help the most is to NOT do this alone, even if you are single, find someone you can talk with on the phone to give you support.

