

When to start toilet training

Signs of readiness in children with autism are not evident like they are with neuro-typical children. The main sign of readiness is compliance, or the child's ability to imitate. If you can get the child to do what you ask, and/or copy an action – then they are ready.

Make sure **YOU** are ready. The child needs 100% commitment during toilet training and it can be emotionally draining on parents. So get yourself in the right frame of mind and set to it. The key with this programme is consistency, everyone needs to be committed. It only takes one person to put a nappy on the child and all your hard work can be ruined.

Summer holidays are the best time to start. Generally a good guide is the first summer after the child turns three. If you leave it later than this (i.e. four to five years) you face the possibility that the child may be less obliged to comply and they know how to push boundaries a little further. Plus habits around toileting will have begun to form as the child has got more aware of bladder and bowel control.

Realistically you need to allow up to three weeks of intensive toilet training. Most children will pick it up within a week, but a few can take up to three weeks. You won't know where your child fits into this until you start. (Remember just one wee in the toilet is progress, look for small signs to start).

During this time you should lean on others around you for support. If you have other children arrange for them to be picked up by friends' parents for the day and arrange this regularly throughout the toilet training period. Better still – send the other children off to out of town relatives for a holiday!

You may want to look at employing some help. University students, particularly those studying psychology, teaching or early childhood are eager for experience and some extra money. If you can't afford this – think of the money you'll save on nappies and put some of this towards it. If you have extra help then you can create a schedule to share the load.

Getting started

Equipment

AVOID potties! Start out with the end in mind. Children with autism have trouble generalising and the last thing you want is to have to carry their pottie around with you everywhere you go!

Children under four are generally too small to be able to sit up on a toilet on their own. Arrange for a step or small stool for the child to stand on to get up on the toilet.

Children under four often also have weak arms and struggle to hold themselves up from falling into the toilet so it's worth investing in a toilet ring to put under the toilet seat. If you are toilet training a boy then look out for seats with a high piece at the front which helps ensure the wees goes into the toilet and not out onto the floor!

You will need at least 10 pairs of underpants. Try buying some that fit now and some the next size up so you get your monies worth out of them.