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## Learning to poo in the loo

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▶ **Dr Eve Fleming**



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## Key Messages

- ▶ Nearly ALL children with autism can be successfully toilet trained
- ▶ Learning to use the toilet can promote education, social experiences and avoid risks
- ▶ Always consider physical factors, features of autism and development.
- ▶ Working together between families, health and education gives the best results.

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## guidelines

- ▶ Keep it fun
- ▶ Positive messages about poo and wee, it is clever
- ▶ **regular drinking/ water and clear fluids**
- ▶ Social stories
- ▶ Link toileting to other skills



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## When to start training

- ▶ Choose a good time for the family
- ▶ Get the right equipment in place – toilet seats, pants, games, stories
- ▶ Avoid times of stress
- ▶ Make sure support is on hand
- ▶ Agreed joint programmes



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## Where to start toilet training?



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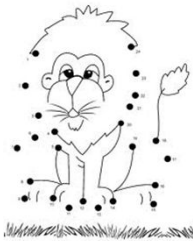
## Motivators and Rewards

- ▶ Peace and quiet.
- ▶ Foods
- ▶ Drinks
- ▶ Arts and crafts
- ▶ Sensory
- ▶ Activities



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## Hints and tips



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## Using motivation

- ▶ Reward effort, not just success
- ▶ Some children like to break their record.
- ▶ Reward other things as well as toileting

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## What children say:

- ▶ Don't get angry
- ▶ I didn't understand why I wasn't allowed to go swimming
- ▶ I don't want to think about it
- ▶ Other children say I smell
- ▶ If I go to the loo it's funny I love it!!!



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**You can start anywhere, where a child is interested and relaxed.**

- ▶ Getting used to bathrooms
- ▶ Wearing pants
- ▶ Washing hands
- ▶ Learning the words for wee and poo
- ▶ flushing the toilet
- ▶ Sitting on the toilet.

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**How autism affects toilet training**

Communication about going to the toilet

Focused interests and behaviours

Sensory effects

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## **Potential difficulties**

- ▶ They may not be interested to wear 'big boy/girl pants' or use the toilet
- ▶ They are often less likely to copy others to learn new skills
- ▶ May not be interested to please you by weeing or pooing in the right place!
- ▶ May not mind if they are wet or have soiled themselves
- ▶ May go to the toilet in inappropriate places

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## **Why may children with autism have difficulties toileting?**

- ▶ They have learned to use a nappy.
- ▶ Understanding the need to use toilets
- ▶ They are less likely to copy others
- ▶ Coping with change
- ▶ Restrictive eating and diets
- ▶ Poor fluid intake
- ▶ Generalising skills to new situations

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## Communication problems

- ▶ Not understanding the words or signs used
- ▶ May not understand what you are asking them to do or why
- ▶ May take language literally “Put the toilet roll in the toilet”!
- ▶ Less likely to say they need to go to the toilet
- ▶ May need information presented visually



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## Some early triggers

- ▶ Rigid diets and poor drinking
- ▶ Postponing toilet training
- ▶ Developmental-physical and psychological maturation
- ▶ Nappies solve the problem

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## Some common problems

- ▶ Constipation
- ▶ Sensory difficulties
- ▶ Wanting a nappy on to poo
- ▶ Using other toilets
- ▶ Toilet refusal

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## Constipation

- ▶ This is very common in all children
- ▶ Restricted diets
- ▶ Limited drinking
- ▶ Holding on to poo
- ▶ Anxiety about toilets



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## Constipation management

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- ▶ Usually needs medication, often for some time
  - ▶ Physical abnormalities are not common, but should be discussed with medics especially if starting at birth
  - ▶ CLEAR WATERY FLUIDS 7 drinks a day
  - ▶ Health eating – if possible!!!!
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## With-holding Poo

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- ▶ Linked to constipation and experience of painful poo
  - ▶ Anxiety
  - ▶ Postponing going to the toilet
  - ▶ Wantint to do other things
  - ▶ Everyone does it at times
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- ▶

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## How to help poo with-holding

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- ▶ Tackle anxiety first
- ▶ Keep the poo soft and regular
- ▶ Toileting after meals 10-30- minutes
- ▶ Keep in a good secure position on the toilet, leaning forward and feet on a step
- ▶ Blowing activities –balloons, kazoo, bubbles feathers
- ▶ Tickling



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## Our Sensory World

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- ▶ Sound (auditory)
- ▶ Touch (tactile)
- ▶ Taste (gustatory)
- ▶ Smell (olfactory)
- ▶ Balance (vestibular)
- ▶ Body awareness (proprioception)
- ▶ Sight (visual)
- ▶ Inside body (interoception)



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## Sensory difficulties

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Responses to sensory experiences are often **different** and **variable**

- ▶ **Sensory avoidance** - leading to avoiding sensations, fear and anxiety
  - ▶ **Sensory seeking** - leading to wanting increased sensory stimulation
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## Some difficulties linked to sensation

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- ▶ Sound –hand driers, echoing bathrooms
  - ▶ Touch-fear of using metal handles to flush
  - ▶ Smell-upset by bathroom products
  - ▶ Sight-upset by glare and bright lights
  - ▶ Taste-reluctance to try new foods and textures
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## **A few more sensory things**

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- ▶ Balance-Feeling unsteady sitting on toilets
- ▶ Body awareness-difficulty in knowing where and how to sit on the toilet
- ▶ Liking the feeling of a nappy –deep pressure
- ▶ Liking the feeling of wee and poo –increased sensory input
- ▶ Lack of awareness of a full bowel or bladder



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## **Responding to sensory problems**

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- ▶ Be the detective
- ▶ Sensory profile
- ▶ Look at the toilet environment
- ▶ Avoid or limit exposure if it creates anxiety
- ▶ Build in the experiences they do like
- ▶ Make toileting fun!



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## Working together

- ▶ Regular communication and planning
- ▶ Shared and agreed goals and language
- ▶ Mutual support
- ▶ Planning for transition
- ▶ Address discrimination and bullying
- ▶ Keyworking

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## Please remember:

- ▶ Avoid saying 'Do you want to go to the toilet'
- ▶ Don't toilet too frequently
- ▶ It may take longer than you expect
- ▶ Look after yourself



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## Top Tips Reminder

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- ▶ Break it into easy steps
  - ▶ Don't delay training indefinitely, children with autism don't like change.
  - ▶ Try to understand what children think.
  - ▶ Understand anxiety
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## Sources of support

- **ERIC**  
[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)  
0845 370 8008



- [bbuk@disabledliving.co.uk](mailto:bbuk@disabledliving.co.uk)
- **One step at a time**  
[www.continencevictoria.org.au/  
resources/children](http://www.continencevictoria.org.au/resources/children)

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