

# Autism and Toileting

## Sensory issues

Some children may have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. Senses may be under or over-sensitive which can make toileting more challenging. This can lead to the child finding it difficult to understand the sensation associated with toileting.

- Sight – (Visual)
- Sound – (Auditory)
- Touch – (Tactile)
- Taste – (Gustatory)
- Smell – (Olfactory)
- Balance – (Vestibular)
- Body awareness – (Proprioception)
- Inside body – (Interoception)

## Potential toileting difficulties:

- Not feel the bowel or bladder is full
- Not respond to their bowel and bladder signals
- Have limited awareness of being wet or soiled
- Like the sensation of wearing a nappy (deep pressure)
- Like the sensation of having a poo in their nappy.
- Have difficulties dealing with the wee and poo – wiping/ smearing / feeling wet
- Struggle with the feel of toilet paper so do not use it
- Like or dislike the bathroom environment

## Things to try:

- Do an environment audit of the bathroom – consider the impact on senses
- Do all toileting in the bathroom to build up a connection between them both
- Consider the temperature of the room
- Consider the temperature/hardness of the toilet seat – try a padded seat
- Non slip mats
- Use a step for your child to get on to the toilet
- Toilet seats which reduce the size of the toilet hole
- Using bubbles to encourage pushing when passing a stool
- Ping pong ball into the toilet – something to aim for
- Using distraction – reading a book, using a gadget or things for the child to hold/play with – playdough or gloop
- Using a weighted blanket whilst sat on the toilet

- Wearing tight lycra shorts instead of nappies / pull-up's
- Limit exposure to environments or tasks that are overwhelming or painful
- Alongside toileting also do fun things in the bathroom
- Try a mirror so the child can see what they are doing
- Be aware of strong scents and noises
- Try using a rolled up towel behind them when sitting on the toilet
- Be aware of parent / carers reaction to behaviours
- Music or soft lighting in the bathroom
- Running a tap to encourage voiding
- Try alternatives to toilet paper such as flushable wipes

## **Behaviours**

The world may seem unpredictable and confusing to a person with autism, and they often prefer to have a daily routine, so that they know what is going to happen each day. It may be difficult for a person with autism to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. They may not feel comfortable with the idea of change, but may cope better if they can prepare for changes in advance.

### **Potential differences:**

Processing information, applying learning from one situation to another, understand and cope with change, organisation and planning.

- Unable to transfer toileting skills to unfamiliar toilets
- Assume someone will know they need help – so they do not tell you
- Difficulty changing routines
- Find the toilet distracting, overwhelming or exciting
- Possible fear and anxiety about using the toilet
- Struggle to get in the correct position when using the toilet
- Remove all their clothes when they use the toilet
- Go to the toilet in inappropriate places e.g. Swimming pool
- Not be socially motivated to wear pants or use the toilet
- Not be motivated to please you by weeing or pooing in the right place

### **Things to try:**

- Keep a diary to look for patterns in toileting
- Try and have a consistent toileting routine for ALL toilets
- Look for non-verbal cues the child needs to go to the toilet
- Implement changes gradually
- Create a low arousal and organised toilet environment
- Share information between home and other school / social settings
- Take a familiar object to other toilets
- Use a step to ensure the child is in the best position for using the toilet
- If appropriate the child watching other family members use the toilet
- Use a timer to visualise how long they need to sit on the toilet

- Breakdown each step into a toileting schedule:  
pants down > sit on the toilet > wee/poo in the toilet > wipe > pants up > trousers up > flush toilet > wash hands

## Communication

A person with autism may have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice.

### Potential difficulties:

- Not understanding words or signs used
- Not understanding what you are asking them to do
- Take language literally “put the toilet roll in the toilet”
- Be less likely to communicate the need to go to the toilet
- Need instructions or information presented visually
- Be less likely to copy others to learn new skills
- Assume you know that they need help – so they do not tell you
- Are unable to communicate that they need help
- Not understand that soiling themselves is a problem

### Things to try:

- Use consistent words to describe wee and poo
- Show the child a picture of the toilet or of the toilet door before you go
- If your child does not understand the pictures, give them a real object e.g. a nappy, or toilet roll, or wipes, before you walk to the toilet
- Clear messages that wee and poo go in to the toilet
- Consistency between home and other settings
- Take to the toilet at regular times, linked to cues in daily routine
- Visual timetables
- Vibrating reminder watches
- Reward charts
- Show them a visual guide about poo from eating, digestion then passing a stool as it can be frightening for some children
- Use Social stories or pictures to communicate messages:

underwear down



use toilet



get toilet paper



wipe



underwear up



flush



wash hands



finish



If no progress made with certain behaviours, consider:

## **WHAT      WHY      HOW**

Considering each of these may give an insight into the underlying reason for the behaviour and how it can be approached and managed.

Further support can be found at:

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

[www.eric.org.uk](http://www.eric.org.uk)

[www.rpcf.co.uk](http://www.rpcf.co.uk)