

Sensory-Friendly Potty Training

A Guide for Professionals & Families

Practical accommodations for children who experience the bathroom differently

Why the Bathroom Is Hard

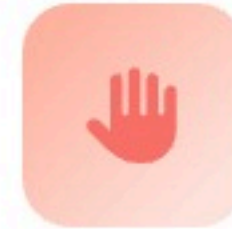
Understanding sensory triggers helps us create supportive environments



Auditory

Toilet flush echo, hand dryer, fan noise — These sudden, loud sounds can trigger fight-or-flight responses in children with auditory sensitivities.

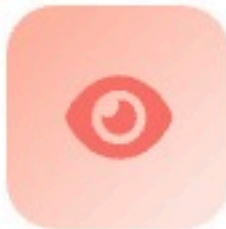
✓ **Quick fix: Let child leave before flushing**



Tactile

Cold seat, wet wipes, unfamiliar textures — Unexpected temperature changes and textures can cause significant discomfort and avoidance behaviors.

✓ **Quick fix: Use padded seat covers**



Visual

Harsh lighting, busy tiles, mirror reflections — Fluorescent lights and visual clutter can overwhelm children with visual processing differences.

✓ **Quick fix: Use soft nightlights instead**



Proprioceptive/Vestibular

Feet dangling, unstable seating, fear of falling in — Lack of physical grounding creates insecurity and makes it difficult to relax pelvic muscles.

✓ **Quick fix: Provide sturdy step stool**

Sources: ERIC (The Children's Bowel & Bladder Charity), Autism Speaks toileting guidance, Sydney Children's Hospitals Network OT resources

For general education only. Not medical advice. Consult your child's healthcare provider for personalized guidance.



Accommodation Toolkit

Evidence-based strategies matched to specific sensory triggers

Trigger	Accommodation	Why It Helps
Loud flush	Let child leave before flushing / Use visual countdown	Restores sense of control; reduces anticipatory anxiety
Cold seat	Seat cover or let child place hand first	Reduces tactile surprise; allows temperature prediction
Bright lights	Nightlight instead of overhead lighting	Lowers visual overwhelm; creates calmer atmosphere
Feet dangling	Sturdy step stool for foot support	Improves stability and pelvic floor relaxation (APTA)
Overwhelming routine	Visual schedule with removable steps	Creates predictability; reduces transition anxiety
Hand dryer noise	Use paper towels or skip hand drying	Avoids triggering auditory sensitivity
Time pressure	Use visual timer; no rushing	Reduces performance anxiety; supports interoception
Communication barriers	AAC board with toileting vocabulary	Supports expression for pre-verbal/non-verbal children

Sources: ERIC, Autism Speaks, APTA Pediatric Pelvic Health, National Autistic Society

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Visual Schedule Template

A printable routine strip — cut out, laminate, and use with your child

Bathroom Routine

i 6-8 steps recommended

1



Walk to bathroom

2



Pants down

3



Sit on potty

4



Wait

5



Wipe

6



Pants up

7



Flush
(Optional)

8



Wash hands

✂ How to Use

1. Print this page
2. Cut out each step card
3. Laminate for durability
4. Arrange in order on strip
5. Point to each step as you go

💡 Pro Tip

Some children benefit from hiding the flush step initially.
The optional step 7 can be removed to reduce anxiety.

📱 YourPottyPal App

Toggle steps on/off digitally

📖 Reference: Autism Speaks Visual Schedule Toolkit

Research supports 6-8 step routines for children with developmental differences

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Communication Board Basics

Essential toileting vocabulary for AAC users — print, laminate, and use

Toileting Vocabulary

10 core words

 Pee	 Poop	 Potty	 Wet	 Dry
 Help	 All done	 Wash hands	 More time	 Hurt

Point to icons or encourage child to point/express

✂ How to Use

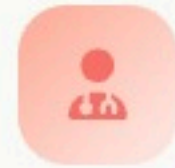
1. Print this page
2. Cut out each icon card
3. Laminate for durability
4. Present options to child
5. Model pointing to icons
6. Celebrate communication attempts

📱 YourPottyPal App Feature

Built-in communication board with optional speech synthesis — supporting pre-verbal and non-verbal children in expressing their toileting needs.

- ✓ Tap to hear word spoken
- ✓ Customizable vocabulary
- ✓ Works offline

📖 **References:** ERIC, Autism Speaks communication supports, AAC best practices



When to Seek Specialist Support

A decision guide for professional referrals



Occupational Therapy

Sensory & Motor

Consider OT referral if:

- ✓ **Persistent sensory avoidance** of bathroom environment
- ✓ **Difficulty with motor sequencing** (clothing management, sitting)
- ✓ **Tactile defensiveness** affecting wiping or hygiene
- ✓ **Poor body awareness** (interoception challenges)

Source: OT referral criteria, sensory processing guidelines



Pelvic Floor PT

Physical Function

Consider pelvic floor PT if:

- ✓ **Chronic stool withholding** lasting >3 months
- ✓ **Pain during bowel movements** or visible straining
- ✓ **Urinary urgency/frequency** patterns or dribbling
- ✓ **Incomplete bladder emptying** or recurrent UTIs

Source: APTA Pediatric Pelvic Health, NASPGHAN



Behavioral Consult

Emotional & Behavioral

Consider behavioral consultation if:

- ✓ **Extreme anxiety or meltdowns** around toileting routines
- ✓ **Regression lasting >4 weeks** after initial success
- ✓ **Toileting refusal impacting** daily functioning or school
- ✓ **Oppositional behaviors** significantly disrupting progress

Source: Autism Speaks, behavioral psychology guidance



Scan for More Resources

Access YourPottyPal's full sensory guide, printable tools, and specialist directory

Free resources for families & professionals