

## Potty Training:

Potty training is often a difficult procedure even for a child of normal abilities. When a child has autism it is one of the more difficult tasks that parents and teachers must face. We know from research that modeling is a great way to teach a lot of new skills; however, potty training is not something you can model. When my son was a baby, I had a preschool and he attended with all the other children. He potty trained himself at eleven months of age by watching what the other boys were doing. I had not even considered potty training him that early but he learned and was successful by imitating what he saw others doing.



I have used a doll similar to this one to potty train several children with autism with great success. The doll is by Fisher Price and is called Little Mommy Potty Doll - I have found it on E-Bay and at Wal-Mart.

<http://www.pottytrainingconcepts.com/Little-Mommy-Potty-Doll-z.html>

Here's how I set it up:

Things to purchase:

- Special potty chair doll
  - This one only urinates when it is sitting on the special potty chair. (There is a magnet in the doll's back that opens the bladder only when it is in proximity to the chair.)
  - This one was purchased at Wal-Mart for under \$20.
- Call bell
  - The kind they used to have in the material department to summon help.
  - Available at office supply stores for under \$5
- Underwear
  - Appropriate for the child who is going to be potty trained
  - Get cool ones- you don't want to ruin pretty underpants by wetting them.
- Rewards
  - Whatever floats the kid's boat (This is one place where tangibles work well. Saying "good job" just doesn't cut it with this task)
    - Stickers
    - M&M's (I'm not big on food treats- but it seems to work with potty training)
    - Small plastic toys

Make the day you start potty training a special day. Put it on the calendar ahead of time. Let them see and play with the doll ahead of time- but don't show them what the doll does on the potty chair. Really build it up that it's a special day. Today is the day you start being really cool.

- 1) Put real underpants on the child. Do not put them back in pull-ups. They need to feel the wetness and that does not happen with pull-ups.
- 2) Set the call bell outside the bathroom door. The reason for this is so you will hear the bell no matter where you are. If the child says “I have to go” by hitting the bell, you will have to get there quickly. This is true in the classroom and at home. Get two bells.
- 3) Have your child drink tons of fluids. Offer carbonated beverages if the child tolerates them. The more they drink the better.
- 4) Get the doll primed by filling it up with water (bottle included). The child probably should not see you feeding the doll all that water. They aren’t going to understand product in- product out anyway.
- 5) Start talking to the doll like it is a real person. Have a conversation like:
  - a. “Oh, you are so big today.” “You are going to use the potty.”
  - b. “Oh, you have to go to the bathroom now?”
  - c. “Ring the bell.” Have the doll’s hand ring the bell on the way in to the bathroom.
  - d. “When you ring the bell, I know you have to go to the bathroom and I’ll come right away.” “Good job.”
  - e. Pat the doll’s underpants and say “Good job your pants are dry right now. You didn’t wet your pants.”
  - f. Pull the doll’s underpants down and put the doll on the potty chair. Say, “Good job, you can go potty in the potty chair now.”
  - g. This doll is great because it takes a few seconds before the doll starts going to the restroom- the bladder opens slowly. As the doll starts going to the bathroom start telling it what a good job it is doing.
  - h. Pull the doll’s pants up when it’s finished. Tell it again, “Good job keeping your pants dry.”
  - i. Have the doll pretend to flush the toilet. Tell it “Good job flushing the toilet.” (Some children with autism do not like the sound of toilets flushing- if this is the case- don’t flush. I’d rather have a toilet to flush a few times a day than have to keep a child in diapers forever.)
  - j. Hand the doll a treat like an M&M and pretend the doll ate the treat. Say, “Good job, you get an M&M because your pants are dry and you used the potty.”
  - k. “Go play.”
  - l. Ask your child if they would like to use the potty and go through the same steps as above for the child that you did for the doll.
  - m. Reward dry pants even if they don’t use the potty- but give double treats if the child goes on the potty and keeps their pants dry.
- 6) When you put the child back in pull-ups you just took two steps back. The child absolutely has to feel uncomfortable when they wet themselves. It means washing a few extra loads a day for a few weeks, but it’s worth your child never being potty trained.
- 7) For some children you may have to reward each step- ringing the bell, pulling pants down, sitting on the toilet, voiding in the toilet, pulling pants back up, flushing etc. You will have to know the child.
- 8) It may take two weeks of this type of heavy training- but you will get the child potty trained. The important key features are underpants only and force fluids as much as possible.

- 9) I trained a 15 year old using this method. His parents thought he was never going to use the bathroom himself.
- 10) The other key feature is this is 24 hours a day 7 days a week. You may have to wake your child up and take them to the restroom in the middle of the night. This can't be done at school and not at home or vice versa. Everyone has to buy into this program 100% or it won't work.
- 11) If they ring the bell- run or sprint to where they are. They will wait till the last possible minute in the beginning and we have to pay off on the bell ringing behavior so we get to them before they have an accident. It's okay- Pavlov is not getting back at you for anything. It's just that for non-verbal children we need some signal they can give you to let you know they have to go.



Anatomically correct dolls are also available. However, they wet immediately so you'll have to feed them over the toilet. (Not as effective) Gotz Aquini dolls available at [www.shop.com](http://www.shop.com) \$24.99.

Here's what TEACCH says about potty training for children with autism:  
<http://www.teacch.com/toilet.htm>

Variations that have worked with other children:

Have a "that was easy button" from staples in the bathroom. The child gets to press the button when they are successful. For some reason this really floated one child's boat.

More ideas coming soon....