



A BRIGHT MAP CAREGIVER GUIDE

The Potty Plan

A practical, child-centered guide to building toileting independence

WARM SUPPORT. CLEAR STEPS. REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

Build a toileting routine around comfort, communication, dignity, and the small successes that lead to lasting independence.



FOR CAREGIVERS SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NEURODIVERSE



Welcome

You are here, you are ready, and you do not have to make toileting feel perfect to make meaningful progress.

This guide was created for caregivers who support individuals who are neurodiverse and want a practical, respectful place to begin.

You will find a flexible stage-based plan, simple behavior-support strategies, and reminders to move at your child's pace.



Small steps count. A calm bathroom visit, a comfortable sit, or one successful trip can all be real progress.



Is Your Child Ready?

There is no single perfect age. Look for a combination of practical, communication, and comfort-based signs.

- ✓ Stays dry for about an hour or longer at times
- ✓ Shows interest in the bathroom, toilet, or family routines
- ✓ Can follow a simple direction such as 'sit down'
- ✓ Notices being wet or soiled, or seeks a change
- ✓ Can communicate discomfort, 'potty,' 'help,' or 'all done' in some way



Two or three signs may be enough to begin gently. If most are not present, focus first on familiarity, communication, and brief comfortable sits.



Set Up for Success

A little preparation makes the routine easier to repeat and easier for your child to understand.

- ✓ Potty chair or secure toilet-seat insert and foot support
- ✓ Easy-on, easy-off clothing
- ✓ A few strong reinforcers reserved for toileting success
- ✓ Simple visuals showing the bathroom steps
- ✓ Timer, data sheet, wipes, and several changes of clothes
- ✓ A short phrase everyone will use consistently



Choose a few low-demand days when routines can stay predictable. The goal is consistency, not a flawless schedule.



Use Reinforcement Well

Reinforcement works best when it is meaningful to your child, delivered quickly, and connected clearly to the success.

Choose something small that can be provided immediately after urinating or having a bowel movement in the toilet. This might be a favorite snack, bubbles, a short video, music, or another brief preferred activity.

At first, you may reinforce approaching or sitting if those steps are new or difficult. As comfort grows, gradually reserve the strongest reward for the toileting outcome you are teaching.



Say exactly what worked: 'You peed in the potty - that means bubbles!' Clear feedback helps your child connect the action with the outcome.



Understand Potty Anxiety

For some children, the bathroom is not simply unfamiliar. It may feel loud, cold, unpredictable, or physically uncomfortable.

Flushing sounds, echoes, lighting, smells, the feel of the seat, and changes in body position can all contribute to distress.

Individuals who are neurodiverse may also have sensory sensitivities, communication differences, or a past experience that makes the routine feel unsafe.

Treat avoidance and distress as useful information. Slowing down is not giving up; it is creating a safer path forward.



What Helps

- ✓ Begin with fully clothed bathroom visits or brief clothed sits
- ✓ Use a simple social story or visual sequence
- ✓ Let your child control the flush, or flush after they leave
- ✓ Offer a familiar fidget, song, book, or calming item
- ✓ Keep early sits very brief and predictable
- ✓ Celebrate each step: entering, approaching, sitting, and completing



Move to the next step when the current one feels calm and familiar - not simply because a certain number of days has passed.



What Usually Does Not Help

- ✓ Rushing or physically placing a distressed child on the toilet
- ✓ Ignoring fear, pain signals, or repeated refusal
- ✓ Using punishment, shame, or negative reactions after accidents
- ✓ Comparing your child's timeline with someone else's
- ✓ Extending sits until they become uncomfortable or aversive



If distress is increasing, pause and reassess the environment, schedule, physical comfort, and teaching steps.



Consent, Assent & Dignity

Toileting support can build independence while also protecting privacy, bodily autonomy, and trust.

Explain what is happening before and during each step. Offer choices wherever possible and notice both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Your child may not choose whether hygiene is needed, but they can often choose the bathroom, seat, order of steps, preferred support, or what happens immediately afterward.

The goal is not compliance at any cost. The goal is safe, dignified, supported independence.



What Respect Looks Like

- ✓ Preview the routine: 'First a quick potty sit, then play'
- ✓ Offer choices: little potty or toilet insert, book or bubbles
- ✓ Use the same calm, neutral language each time
- ✓ Watch for pulling away, freezing, crying, or shutting down
- ✓ Pause when distress is significant and return to an easier step
- ✓ Provide privacy appropriate to your child's age and support needs



Predictability and choice can reduce uncertainty without removing the child's voice from the process.

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Stage 1: Build the Routine

Keep the day simple, comfortable, and easy to observe.

- ✓ Use underwear, loose bottoms, or a clothing plan that makes body cues easier to notice
- ✓ Offer scheduled bathroom visits about every 20-30 minutes to start, then adjust from your data
- ✓ Keep sits short unless your child is comfortable staying longer
- ✓ Reinforce the exact step currently being taught
- ✓ Record trips, successes, accidents, and signs you noticed



Stay close to home if that reduces pressure, but build in play, movement, food, and normal connection throughout the day.

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Stage 2: Prompt and Adjust

- ✓ Review your early data for common timing, cues, and dry intervals
- ✓ Adjust scheduled trips to match the pattern you observed
- ✓ Pause briefly before giving a reminder so your child has a chance to initiate
- ✓ Use simple clothing and practice pulling it up and down
- ✓ Continue immediate reinforcement for successful toileting



The purpose of this stage is not to remove every prompt. It is to begin using the least help your child currently needs.

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Stage 3: Practice Real Life

- ✓ Respond to individual cues such as pausing, wiggling, hiding, or holding
- ✓ Prompt your child's communication response for 'potty,' 'help,' or 'all done'
- ✓ Let your child complete familiar steps independently
- ✓ When the earlier stages feel comfortable, consider one short, low-pressure outing
- ✓ Bring spare clothing and keep expectations realistic



Each stage may take a few days, several weeks, or longer. Progress is measured by learning and comfort - not by the calendar.



Troubleshooting

THEY WILL NOT SIT

Return to an easier step, try another seat, add foot support, shorten the sit, or pair the bathroom with a calming activity.

THEY GO RIGHT AFTER LEAVING

Shorten the interval between visits and record the timing. Avoid turning this into a power struggle.

THEY SEEM AFRAID

Identify sensory triggers, model the routine, use visuals, and build tolerance one small step at a time.

PROGRESS HAS STOPPED

Take a planned break or simplify the goal. Restart when the routine can feel calm and predictable again.



Pain, withholding, hard stools, frequent accidents, or a sudden regression may require guidance from your child's pediatrician or another qualified professional.



ABA Strategies That Help

USE VISUALS

Show the sequence and what happens next.

BE CONSISTENT

Use the same routine and brief language across caregivers.

FADE PROMPTS

Reduce help gradually so independence can grow.

REINFORCE QUICKLY

Deliver the selected reinforcer immediately after success.

TRACK USEFUL DATA

Record timing, outcomes, cues, bowel movements, and possible barriers.



Data should make the plan easier to personalize - not make family life feel like a research project.



Helpful Printable Tools

Simple tools can make expectations clearer for both the child and caregiver.

✓ Potty-routine visual schedule

✓ Daily toileting data tracker

✓ Sticker chart or token board

✓ Personalized social story

✓ Caregiver quick-reference plan

✓ Celebration certificate



Choose only the tools that reduce effort or improve clarity. More materials do not automatically create better learning.



A Note to Caregivers

You are supporting a deeply personal skill, and that work can ask a lot of both you and your child.

Some days will feel encouraging. Others may bring more accidents, hesitation, or a need to step back. None of those moments erase the learning that has already happened.

Keep the routine safe. Notice the small gains. Ask for help when you need it. Your child's timeline does not need to look like anyone else's to be meaningful.



You are not behind. You are building a skill with patience, dignity, and care - one step at a time.