

Azrin, Nathan, Ph.D. & Foxx, Richard, M., Ph.D. Toilet Training In Less Than a Day. New York: Pocket Books, 1974.

The Trials of Toilet Training

Toilet training is difficult for both parent and child. Based on the research of two psychologists, Nathan Azrin and Richard Foxx, the average child can be fully trained in less than four hours. They began their training with mentally handicapped adults and successfully taught 95% in three days. With the added emphasis on language and verbal rehearsal they attempted to teach children and were astounded at the results. Their methods eliminate the fear damaging the child's psyche by making toilet training a pleasant experience. The child is not simply toilet "trained", he is toilet "educated", that is, the complete process from knowing it's time to emptying the pot and flushing the waste down, all unsupervised. Any parent would agree, this is incredible. They use a combination of the same principals used in Practical Applications of Psychology. The overall objective is to teach the child to toilet himself with the same independence as an adult without the need for reminders, continued praise, or assistance. This method is rapid because of the variety of learning techniques. Learning by imitation, learning by teaching, a partial reinforcement schedule with rewards that increase the need and the negative reinforcement of disapproval are all employed. Children learn best by imitation and teaching with the aid of a hollow doll. The child gives the doll a drink then is told the doll has to "peepee" and he must help her. After the child assists in removing the doll's pants, the liquid is released. The child must observe the flow of liquid into the potty chair. The adult and the child then praise the doll and the child then assists the doll in redressing and emptying the pot in the standard toilet and flushes. Then the child is instructed to ask if the doll is dry and feel her pants. If they are dry the doll gets a treat. The child is then asked if he is dry; if he is, he can then eat the doll's treat. After two or three drills, distract the child and cause an 'accident' by spilling some liquid on the doll's pants. When the child discovers the wetness, use instructions and guidance to help the child correct the doll. First, let the doll know he is displeased, "Big girls don't wet their pants." Second, the child helps the doll practice again on the potty then back to the scene of the accident. Since the pants will still be wet, this can be continued three times. Then have the child feel his own pants, and if they are dry he is rewarded with a drink. The child then assists the doll in changing her pants. The doll demonstration trials are continued until the child understands all the steps; usually less than an hour. When questioning the child, begin with an instruction, "Go to the potty." After a few times, switch to "Do you have to potty?" to a general statement, "Where do you potty?" to "Are your pants dry?" which is not a reminder, but a dry pants inspection. To increase motivation, use all types of rewards: Hugging, smiling, clapping, verbal praise, snacks, drinks and friends or family members who care. Always tell the child why you are praising him. In the beginning, show approval at the start of an act to encourage the next step as done with shaping, then as he progresses show approval only for the completion. Praise is further limited to dry pants inspections, since this is the overall objective. Also, as you see the child needing less manual guidance, stand further and further away. Resist the urge of further assisting the child. When an accident does occur, spend a few seconds verbally displaying disappointment, "No, your pants are wet, you have to practice some more." Practice twice going to the pot from the scene of the accident and pulling down pants at a quick pace, then raising them again. Practice another eight times from different locations, so he will remember to rapidly use the bathroom, no matter where he is. The next step is the inspection. Since he has not changed yet, they are wet. Tell

him again that you and his heros are disappointed. Repeat ten times. Have the child take off the wet pants, put them in the laundry, get a new pair, put them on and then clean up any leakage with a sponge. Love your child, but disapprove of wetting. If the procedure does not work with the child, continue where you left off the previous day. In any event, continue dry pants inspections until no accidents occur for a week. Accidents will happen because of new distractions, use the same corrective procedures previously discussed.