

Information Sheet

Holidays: Preparation and Practicalities for Families with an Individual with an ASD

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Planning a holiday is exciting and sometimes stressful. If you have a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) a trip away may involve extra organising and preparation. This guide will help you prepare. The word 'child' is used throughout this document, but the information provided may also be applicable to adults.

Deciding where to go

When choosing a holiday destination, find out what facilities are provided and whether the staff can understand disabilities in general, or ideally, ASD.

Consider the specific needs of your child. For example, if your child is particularly sensitive to noise, you could ask how close your hotel room will be to the pool area, bar or restaurant. Groups of people may gather there all day and therefore some noise will be inevitable.



Preparation

Once you have decided on your destination, it is advisable to tell your child about the trip. Some individuals may find change difficult, which can lead to anxiety or challenging behaviours. One suggestion is to compile a booklet about the holiday, including pictures from brochures and other visual materials. These supports will help your child to understand where they are going and what it will be like when they are there. However, be wary if the child conceptualises things in a very literal way, as they may be upset if the holiday is not the same as the images they have seen.

Another suggestion is to create a timetable of what you will be doing on each day. How structured this timetable will be depends on how much the individual relies on routine. You could begin by adding the times or approximations of when you will have breakfast, lunch and dinner. Some children will feel more comfortable with a detailed schedule of what will happen on each day, while others may be happy with less structured activities like 'explore the hotel' on the first day, 'go to beach' for the second day and so on. Sticking to some sort of routine each day should benefit everyone.

If your child has not travelled on a plane before (or if you are going from a new

airport or on a bigger/smaller plane), you may like to visit the airport before you go on holiday. This will help your child to understand what the airport is like, as well as allowing them to experience the journey to the airport before you go. You could contact the airline directly, and explain to them that your child has an ASD. You may need to provide some general information about the condition, as well as some details on your child's particular needs and habits. This will help the airline staff to support your family. Autism Victoria can provide information sheets on Autism and Asperger Syndrome to pass on if you require them.



Some airports may be able to arrange for you to tour around an aircraft or a simulator to help those with disabilities or who might be nervous about flying. This may benefit your child as it provides some impression of what being in an aircraft might be like.

Practical Considerations

Check-in

Discuss your check-in arrangements with the airline. You may be able to check-in early and avoid waiting in a queue, or sit in a quiet area while you wait for your flight to be called. There may be an option to board first or last, depending on what would be most beneficial for your child.

You could also make enquiries about sitting in either the front or back row of the plane, where there is often more room. However this is often where aircraft toilets are located, which means there may be a high

level of activity or noise from other passengers.

Special Requirements

Remember to give the airline advance notice if your child has any special dietary requirements, particularly if they are following the gluten or casein-free diet as this may take longer to organise. You will also need to let your hotel/s know. You may also wish to take a meal that you have prepared for your child, in case of any difficulties obtaining a meal which meets your child's dietary requirements. Some holiday companies provide forms for passengers with disabilities where they can write any special requirements, so if you are travelling as part of a holiday package you may wish to contact your travel agent or provider about this. Alternatively, if you tell your airline or holiday company of any special needs over the telephone, you should confirm these requirements in writing as well.

If your child has particular medication needs, you may need to discuss this with your child's doctor before the holiday. It is wise to take all medications your child will require for the length of the stay, as well as some extras in a separate bag (in case of loss/delay of luggage).

If your holiday will include any trips to theme or water parks you may want to enquire whether these places require specific proof of your child's disability, in order to avoid the queues or make use of the disabled facilities. Some may have particular forms for you to fill out, or may supply a specific member of staff to be your contact or guide for the day.

Insurance

We are not aware of any travel insurance companies who are specifically aware of ASD. We can only suggest that you check the policy of each company.

Delays

Even the best-planned holiday may be affected by unexpected delays. Your child may find it difficult to deal with these unplanned aspects of the trip. Engaging your child with a favourite activity or toy whilst waiting may help. As a part of your preparation, you could write a Social Story to explain that delays may occur and some waiting will be necessary.

Flying time

To help your child cope with the aircraft noise, particularly during take-off and landing, you may consider using some sort of headphones. Some individuals on the autistic spectrum like to listen to music. Perhaps your child might like to listen to a familiar piece of calming, reassuring music while in the airport or during the flight. There are also headphones which have been designed to shut out all surrounding noise, including the sounds of aircraft engines. As electronic devices are not usually allowed to be used during take-off landing, you may want to discuss this option and any alternatives with the airline before your flight.

There may also be other items which would keep your child occupied and happy while travelling. These might be favourite toys or objects they like to play with. You may like to pack a pillow, bed linen or a sleeping bag as the familiarity of items from home can help a person with an ASD feel more relaxed in a new environment. Remember to also bring any items which are used as 'comforters' at home and may help your child relax while away.



Behaviour

At the start of the holiday you may like to establish some simple 'holiday rules'. These should tell your child about your expectations and should be positive. Write these down if this is helpful for your child. Use clear language as a reminder: "We don't do that on holiday." Once you have decided on these rules, stick with them and be consistent, to help establish boundaries for the holiday.

Look out for any behavioural changes. For some individuals with ASDs, new behaviour patterns emerge when on holiday or in an unfamiliar environment. They may communicate things like tiredness, boredom or stress in a different way, so it is important to analyse new behaviours carefully.

Remember that any change in temperature might also affect a person's behaviour. Some children may feel irritated by the heat and need time to adjust. They may need explanations and reminders to change their clothes, especially if they need to change from trousers and jumpers to shorts and t-shirts. You may want to discuss this change in clothing before going on holiday or incorporate it into your holiday schedule.

Language problems

While on holiday, you may or may not want to tell others about your child's difficulties. Below, there are some useful phrases in a number of languages for use in difficult situations. It may be helpful to write these onto small business-style cards and carry a stock with you, if you are not familiar with the local language.

Autism Victoria has Alert cards in English which can be

purchased to pass out to members of the public to save time in explaining to them why your child may be reacting to a situation. The card briefly explains Autism and asks for understanding from others.

French

My son is not being naughty. He is a child with autism. Please show some understanding.

Ce n'est pas que mon fils n'est pas sage. C'est un enfant autiste. Veuillez faire preuve de compréhension.

My daughter is not being naughty. She is a child with autism. Please show some understanding.

Ce n'est pas que ma fille n'est pas sage. C'est une enfant autiste. Veuillez faire preuve de compréhension.

German

My son is not being naughty. He is a child with autism/He is autistic. Please show some understanding.

Mein Sohn ist nicht frech. Er hat Autismus. Bitte zeigen Sie etwas Verständnis und Mitgefühl.

My daughter is not being naughty. She is a child with autism/She is autistic. Please show some understanding.

Meine Tochter ist nicht frech. Sie hat Autismus. Bitte zeigen Sie etwas Verständnis und Mitgefühl.

Italian

My son is not being naughty. He is a child with autism/He is autistic. Please show some understanding.

Mio figlio non e' cattivo. E' autistico. Per favore, siate comprensivi.

My daughter is not being naughty. She is a child with autism/She is autistic. Please show some understanding.

Mia figlia non e' cattiva. E' autistica. Per favore, siate comprensivi.

Spanish

This boy is not misbehaving. He is autistic. Please have some compassion.

Este niño no es travieso. El es autístico. Prendeis compasión por cortesía.

This girl is not misbehaving. She is autistic. Please have some compassion.

Esta niña no es traviesa. Ella es autística. Prendeis compasión por cortesía.

Resources

Autism and airport travel safety tips: a guide for parents and carers. By Dennis Debbaudt. Available at:

<http://www.sath.org/index.php?sec=768&id=2371> . Focuses on travel within the USA but has some useful tips for travel worldwide.

Airport Awareness: travel advice for parents and carers of children on the Autistic Spectrum. Developed by Manchester Airport. Available at:

[http://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/manweb.nsf/alldocs/4D4CC20F97DD74008025736400407C2E/\\$File/Airport+Awareness+book.pdf](http://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/manweb.nsf/alldocs/4D4CC20F97DD74008025736400407C2E/$File/Airport+Awareness+book.pdf). Activity booklet includes colour photos of Manchester Airport, information on flying and a 'worry page' for children to express their concerns over flying/going on holiday.

Writing Social Stories. By Carol Gray. How to write a Social Story to help children with ASDs understand social situations. Available from the Autism Victoria Library: #1951.

Travelling Through the Airport. Developed by Irish Autism Action for the Dublin Airport Authority

<http://www.dublinairport.com/gns/at-the-airport/autism-asd.aspx>

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