



Traveling and Vacations

- Traveling to places which are unfamiliar or out of the ordinary routine can be difficult for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Try to select trips and vacation destinations that would be most tolerable for the child. Keep in mind the length of the trip, seasonal weather, crowds, and available activities. Arrange vacation plans during times that there may be less traffic and less crowds. This may help to reduce many challenges and provide for more availability of staff to help at the location.
- Many websites provide background information about the destination. If not, call to speak to a supervisor about accommodations, the location of customer service at the location, bathrooms, and exits. Other questions can include the least crowded times; the intensity of volume, sound, and lights; and a schedule of activities or events. It can be helpful to use travel agencies that are familiar with travelers having special needs.
- Before the trip, review pictures, videos, and maps together. This can help familiarize the child with the destination, see different options, and build excitement.
- Role play different situations to practice things like waiting in lines, going through security at an airport, remaining in the vehicle, and wearing safety belts. Videos, social stories, and other visual aids help to prepare for the trip, understand appropriate behavior, and can help to reduce anxiety.
- When going on a trip, bring along favorite snacks, toys, and other items that can help make him or her feel more comfortable. Video games and other electronic devices with headphones can help distract from increased sensory challenges and help ease lengthy trips. Save a couple of highly preferred items in case something unexpected happens along the way.
- It is important to have the child carry identification when traveling. The identification should also include the child's method of communication and any challenges that are important to know in case he or she gets separated from parents or caregivers.
- Bad weather, broken rides, closed areas, detours, and other obstacles may change or cancel intended plans. When talking about schedules, routes and activities, use expressions such as "we might visit," "if it's available," and "we'll try to." Let the child know there may be an alternative in case something may not go as planned.
- During the vacation, transitioning from one activity or location to another may be difficult for someone with ASD. Use toys, snacks, or other enjoyable items to help with these changes. Visual aids, activity schedules, or timers may also help ease the transitions.
- It is helpful to reveal the child's challenges to people who can be helpful to the child and those with him or her. Airport representatives, flight attendants, hotel staff, customer service representatives, and others in the travel and hospitality industry rely on parents and caregivers for ways to help make the experience enjoyable and comfortable for everyone involved. Honest communication may result in such things as alternate access, private waiting areas, or extra time allowances.
- Other travelers may have their own perceptions of the child's behaviors. If someone shows or expresses difficulty with the child's behaviors, honestly communicating what's going on. Most times people are sensitive and will be more accommodating once they understand the situation.

- Many hotel rooms have suites where families can prepare meals in the room or call for room service. This might be a helpful option if a difficulty occurs at a public eating area.
- When traveling by airplane, call the Transportation Security Commission (TSA Cares) toll free at 1-855-787-2227 72 hours prior to traveling with questions about screening policies, procedures and what to expect at the security checkpoint. TSA Cares serves as an additional, dedicated resource specifically for passengers with disabilities, medical conditions or other circumstances or their loved ones who want to prepare for the screening process prior to flying. Public transportation providers cannot refuse to transport a person solely because involuntary behavior offends, annoys, or inconveniences employees or other passengers unless the behaviors are unsafe or injurious. The e-mail address for TSA Cares is TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov

Helpful Resources

- **Airport Awareness**
www.manchesterairport.co.uk
- **Autism Explores**
Pre-flight simulations for people with special needs are available at the Philadelphia International Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport, etc. For more information about the Autism Explores program, call (215) 456-6083.
- **Autism in the Museum**
<http://www.autisminthemuseum.org/>
- **Safe Travel for People with Autism or Intellectual Disabilities – Transportation Security Commission (TSA)**
<http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/travelers-disabilities-and-medical-conditions>
- **Travel Tips for Children with Autism**
<https://www.parents.com/health/autism/resources/travel-tips-children-with-autism/>
- **Traveling with Autism**
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/traveling-autism>
- **TSA Cares: Screening Travelers on the Autism Spectrum**
<https://www.tsa.gov/videos/tsa-cares-screening-travelers-autism-spectrum-0>
- **TSA Disability Notification Card**
http://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/disability_notification_cards.pdf
- **Wings for Autism – The Arc**
An airport rehearsal for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. To alleviate some of the stress involved in taking a family vacation with a child with autism, families can practice entering the airport, getting boarding passes, going through security and boarding a plane. More information is available at <http://www.thearc.org/wingsforautism>.

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