



Errands and Outings

Involve your child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on community outings as much as possible. Although it can be challenging, it is worth it because it exposes the child to many learning experiences. It may take additional planning and support, but this practice helps to make the experiences more comfortable and enjoyable.

- Try to plan an agenda for the outing or for the day. Use a picture or written activity schedule to provide the child with a plan. Try to include other options that may happen as a result of unexpected occurrences such as bad weather or a store closing early. Explain the activities and expectations in understandable ways. A template to create social stories, as well as other helpful resources, can be found at www.childrens-specialized.org/KohlsAutismAwareness.
- It is often helpful to give the child appropriate tasks to do during the outing. Let the child pick out items, help with the grocery list, compare prices, or find a particular color or size. Create games during errands to help occupy the child or distract him or her from other challenges that may arise.
- Shopping experiences can be challenging for people with ASD. At first, it may be helpful to go for short trips or to get familiar with the environment and social interactions. Going out with other families can provide additional support if challenges arise.
- Many things can happen during an outing, so try to be as prepared as possible. Bring along toys or activities that are enjoyable in the car and during the outing. Understand it may be necessary to leave the location or change plans if behaviors get too challenging.
- When going to a restaurant, try to prepare ahead of time and have a plan. Let the child pick his or her food choice before getting to the restaurant. Ask for the check as soon as possible after the food arrives to save time. It may be helpful to ask to sit at a particular table that is most comfortable or away from distractions. It is acceptable to remove items on the table that may be distracting.
- It is helpful to return to familiar places, particularly those that have been accommodating to the needs of the child and family. Get to know the owner, manager, or staff so that they can learn more about the interests and needs of the child. Typically, the staff want to be helpful but may not know how to help. Open communication helps them to provide support if negative situations arise.
- People in the community may stare or have opinions about how the child with ASD is behaving. Decide ahead of time how to respond. It may be helpful to use the opportunity to educate about autism, as a way to make a positive community connection, or it can be ignored.
- Social outings can be more positive if they can be related to an interest of the child. After a child gets used to these experiences, the child can begin to explore other destinations.

