

Going on a family vacation can be great fun but also a bit stressful. Stress may increase when the preparations include accommodations for a child or adult loved one with autism. We offer these tips, along with some recommended websites and apps that can help you prepare your family for a smooth trip.

Milestones provides coaching services to all family members, professionals, and self-advocates. Services include connecting participants to resources and providing general information and assistance. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at (216) 464-7600 or info@milestones.org.

Planning the trip

When thinking about a family vacation, involve your loved one with autism in the selection and planning process when possible. Ideally, the destination and activities would engage the interests of the entire family. Older loved ones with autism may enjoy “researching” the destination to find out available activities, cost of activities and other information that may be of interest to them. Many travel agencies and travel websites specialize in tailoring vacations for families with special needs, such as:

Autistic globetrotting: Autism travel made easy: www.autisticglobetrotting.com/

Surfside Beach: Your Autism Friendly Vacation Destination: www.surfsidebeach.org/visitors

Travelling with Children on the Autism Spectrum: www.myfamilytravels.com/content/52306-traveling-children-autism-spectrum

Specialized travel services for families desiring to vacation with a special needs family member: www.autismadventuretravel.com/

Cruise vacation services to accommodate adults and families with children with special needs: www.autismontheseas.com/

Recommended vacation destinations: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/06/06/32-vacation-destinations-for-individuals-with-disabilities-or-special-needs/

Universal Orlando for Guests with Autism: www.orlandovacation.com/universal-studios/visiting-with-special-needs/autism/

Disney Guests with Autism: www.orlandovacation.com/disney-world/special-needs-guide/guests-with-autism/

7 Travel Agencies for Special Needs Travel: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/04/04/7-travel-agencies-for-special-needs-t

Trippin' With Jamie Travel Consultant: www.trippinwithjamie.com/

Packing

An older loved one can assist in his/her own packing by laying outfits out for each day based on what the family may be doing. Packing outfits by day can be helpful with organization and assuring that there are an adequate amount of clothing items. A similar strategy can be used with packing toiletries. Have your loved one lay out everything he/she needs from the start of the day to the end of the day.

When preparing for travel, **think about your loved one's sensitivities**. Does he/she have trouble with loud noises? If so, remember noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs and have your loved one try them out at home. Pack sunglasses if brightness might be an issue. Bring gum or snacks to avoid ear popping on airplane takeoff and landing or to soothe rumbling tummies in the car.

Suggested Packing List: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/06/06/32-vacation-destinations-for-individuals-with-disabilities-or-

Medical and Safety Concerns

It can be useful to check with your loved one's health care professionals for medical recommendations while travelling. A one-page medical history and physician's letter stating your loved one's disability may be needed in an emergency and to verify certain accommodations.

Additionally, make sure you have all medications and the phone number for your pharmacy with you. Most national chains can transfer a medication prescription to another store, but if you are not sure, ask your loved one's doctor for copies of prescriptions in case you need to refill.

It may be useful to get an ID tag for your loved one like a card, bracelet, temporary tattoo or shoelace tag. There are many options available online.

Consider having your loved one wear a custom shirt or bright colored shirts, especially if you are going to be somewhere crowded, like a Disney park or major city.

Getting Ready to Go

Contact the hotel where you will be staying directly to request specific accommodations. If you are staying with a friend or family member, have a conversation with them about what will make your stay more pleasant. Take into consideration special food or drinks, sleeping arrangements and potential allergies.

Use social stories to talk with your loved one about different travel situations that might arise. To learn more about social stories, read Carol Gray's article titled "What Are Social Stories™?" at www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories/what-are-social-stories.

Be prepared with things to do. Pack favorite old toys with a few new toys to engage your loved one on the trip. The combination of both will go a long way to keep your loved one busy and pass the time. Bring all chargers for electronic devices, headphones, or extra batteries. Download some fun new apps to surprise him when you start your trip. Check out the list of fun travel game apps at the end of this tool kit.

Make a checklist or visual schedule about the entire travel day for your loved one. Let him/her keep track of time, stops and things to do before reaching your final destination. Don't forget to build in bathroom and meal breaks. A timer on a watch or cell phone may help your loved one gauge how much time is left before the next step or before arriving.

Airplane Travel

Airplane travel can be challenging for everyone. **Prepare your loved one in advance** to help reduce anxiety and make the journey more pleasant. There are several books you can read with your loved one to help him/her to understand what it will look and feel like to travel in a plane. Having toys, electronic devices, snacks readily available may be helpful during inevitable wait times in lines, boarding, etc.

Call the airline several days before your day of travel and ask about bringing your loved one to the airport to walk around and go through security to a gate. Many airlines will accommodate you, and this will give you a dry run before your actual travel day. This will also give your loved one an opportunity to explore the airport so it becomes familiar. There are several airports and airlines that sponsor programs. To learn about one of these programs called Wings for Autism, visit www.thearc.org/wingsforautism.

This video from CNN is about one family's experience with Wings for Autism:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=APMbslg59_I

This link from huffingtonpost.com offers some helpful tips for your child during airplane travel:
www.huffingtonpost.com/minitime/7-tips-for-flying-with-an_b_3178970.html.

Airports and Special Needs Travel: A Complete Guide: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/05/03/airports-and-special-needs-travel-a-complete-guide/

Airplane Travel: 5 Books to help prepare your special needs child:
www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2011/12/05/airplane-travel-5-books-to-help-prepare-your-special-needs

Your Right as an Air Traveler with a Disability: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/06/05/air-travelers-with-disabilities-here-are-your-rights/

Maneuvering through Security Checkpoints

Print and carry this TSA Disability Notification Card with you and present to a TSA officer in case you need additional assistance at security: www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability_notification_card_508.pdf

www.tacanow.org/family-resources/traveling-with-your-children-with-asd/

autisticglobetrotting.com/guide-to-get-through-airport-security-for-families-and-kids-with-autism.html

<mailto:www.tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures>

For an older loved one with autism who may be able to travel alone, in addition to their ID, consider having them carry an "informational" card that they could show to a TSA employee or other airport employee if they were having trouble finding their gate or getting anxious about another situation. The card could read something like "I am a young man/woman with autism spectrum disorder. As you speak to me, please speak slowly and calmly so I can understand you. I am not being rude to you if I do not look directly at your eyes/face, I am still listening to you. It may be helpful to show me in addition to just telling me. If you have any questions or other concerns, please call (provide names, relationship, phone contact)." Additional information that may be helpful would relate to any actions that may appear 'odd' to someone else. For more information: www.autismspeaks.org/news/news-item/id-cards-helping-police-interact-drivers-autism

Ohio airport information:

- Cleveland Hopkins International Airport: www.clevelandairport.com/
- Akron/Canton Airport: www.akroncantonairport.com/the-airport/passengers-with-disabilities
- Port Columbus International Airport: flycolumbus.com/at-port-columbus/special-assistance/
- CVG Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport: www.cvgairport.com
- James M. Cox Dayton International Airport: www.flydayton.com/
- Toledo Express Airport: www.toledoexpress.com/
- Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport: www.yngwrnair.com/media-faqs.cfm

Using Social Stories

Another way to prepare for airplane travel is to create a social story and then role play how to behave on a plane. Set up chairs simulating the aisles of an airplane and ask questions that a flight attendant might ask. Have your loved one practice appropriate responses. Potential travel social story scenarios might include:

- Boarding and exiting an airplane, train or bus
- Using the bathroom on the plane, train or bus
- Flight/traffic delays
- Airplane turbulence
- Flying etiquette (including takeoff and landing)
- Train, car and bus etiquette
- Going through security at an airport

Road Trips

Taking a road trip gives you more flexibility in scheduling. When determining your timeline, start with your preferred arrival date and time and count backwards. Add in plenty of time for meal breaks, stretching your legs or using the bathroom. Finding side trips like a fun landmark, a swimming pool, or a restaurant that serves your loved one's favorite food along the way might keep your family entertained and could make the trip less taxing.

The most important tip to remember on a road trip is staying flexible. You won't be able to predict every need your loved one has along the way or what his mood will be! By padding extra time into your travel schedule you can avoid arriving late to your destination. If you need to stay in a hotel along the way, make reservations at more than one along your route, so if you don't get as far as you anticipate you won't have to worry about finding an available hotel room.

Before your trip, buy some small new toys or travel games that you can give throughout the trip. And don't forget to save some trinkets for the return trip home!

Additional Suggestions for Road Trips:

Holiday Road Trips: Five Tips to Reduce Stress: www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2014/12/19/holiday-road-trips-five-tips-reduce-stress

70 Tips and Tricks for Special Needs Road Trips: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/05/23/70-tips-and-tricks-for-special-needs-road-trips/

Additional Information

Autism Speaks has a comprehensive guide by Ann Schlosser called “Ten Strategies for Travelling with a Child with Autism Or How Do We Survive the Trip?” The easy-to-read guide breaks down travel into many categories and is chockfull of great ideas. Find this guide at www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/family-services/schlosser.pdf

Autism Speaks offers a list of tips for preparing a person with autism and environment for a better travel experience. Transitions are usually difficult for many on the spectrum and traveling is really a series of transitions. Preparing your loved one, of any age, as much as possible will make any trip a more enjoyable experience for all involved. Some advance planning of specific steps of the trip can be made ahead of time. www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/family-services/chantal.pdf

Read the *Parents Magazine* article titled “Travel Tips for Children with Autism” at www.parents.com/health/autism/resources/travel-tips-children-with-autism/?page=1

Autism Speaks offers a comprehensive list of books and articles for further reading about traveling with a child with autism. View this list at www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/community-connections/traveling-tips-individuals-autism-and-their-families

US citizens or permanent residents with a permanent disability can obtain an Access Pass -- a free lifetime pass to US owned parks: www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/01/03/do-you-have-your-access-pass-yet/

Apps for Entertainment

Here are some apps that might help pass the time, some specifically meant for travel:

Smart Fish: Frequent Flyer

Ages 5 and under: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/id611247027?mt=8

Draw and Tell HD is a fun drawing app that offers color pages.

Ages 5 and under: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/draw-tell-hd-by-duck-duck/id504752087?mt=8

PBS Kids Mobile offers favorite shows and character-driven games from PBS.

Ages 5 and under: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/pbs-kids-video/id435138734?mt=8

Road Trip Bingo

All Ages: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/roadtrip-bingo/id384996173?mt=8

Tales2Go is a subscription mobile audiobook program that is free for the first 30 days. Offers books for kids All Ages: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/tales2go/id458539653?mt=8

Bumpy Ride

All Ages: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/bumpy-road/id423855879?mt=8

Mad Libs

School Age: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/mad-libs/id326885152?mt=8

Minecraft PE

School Ages: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/minecraft-pocket-edition/id479516143?mt=8

Scribble My Story

Ages 6-8: Preview Link: app.scribblepress.com/

Kids Maps is a U.S Map puzzle game that teaches kids geography.

Ages 6-8: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/kids-maps-map-puzzle-game/id445921010?mt=8

Kid Weather

Ages 3- 10: Preview Link: www.kidweatherapp.com/

Draw Rider

Ages 10+ iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/draw-rider/id629065073?mt=8

Extreme Road Trip 2

Ages 12+ Preview Link: extremeroadtrip2.com/

What's The Plate?

Ages 12+: iTunes Preview Link: itunes.apple.com/us/app/whats-plate-guess-phrase-on/id892904720?mt=8