Travel Trips for Families with an Individual on the Autism Spectrum

Chantal Sicile-Kira, author of Autism Life Skills; Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum and Autism Spectrum Disorders has traveled widely with her son who has autism. She offers some advice. For more information, go to www.chantalsicile-kira.com.

Transitions are usually difficult for many on the spectrum, and traveling is really a series of transitions.

Preparing the person – child, teenager or adult – as much as possible will make any trip a more enjoyable experience for all involved. Some advanced planning of specific steps of the trip can be made ahead of time. Below are tips for both preparing the person (1), and preparing the environment for a better travel experience (2).

(1) PREPARING THE PERSON: Leaving the security of home for a new place can be off putting for individuals with autism. How you prepare the person on the spectrum depends on his or her age, ability level. Here are some tips:

• Think of the individual’s daily routine and the items he or she likes or needs and bring them along to make him feel more at home. Bring whatever foods and drinks will keep him happy on the trip, especially if there are dietary restrictions.
• *When you are packing for the journey and if that you lose it will not be the end of the world. If he only plays with one favorite item, try to find a duplicate and see if you can “break it in” before the trip.
• Do not wash any items (including plush toys) before the trip as the individual may feel comfort in the “home” smell of his cherished item.
• Put up a monthly calendar with the date departure clearly marked, and have the person check off every day until departure. Bring the calendar with you and mark off the days in one place or on the trip, always having the return date indicated.
• Put together a picture and word “travel book” of what means of transport you are going to be using to, who you are going to see, where you will sleep, and what you will do or see at your destination. Go over the travel plans with the person, like you would a storybook as often as you like in preparing for the trip. Use a three-ring binder is best, as you can add extra pages or insert the calendar mentioned above for use on the trip.
• Put together a picture or word schedule of the actual journey to take with you on your trip. Add extra pages to the travel book. Add Velcro and attach pictures or words in order of the travel sequence. For example, a picture to represent the car ride to the airport, going through security, getting on the airplane, etc. For car trips, pictures representing different stops on the trip and number of miles to be driven can be used. Add an envelope and attach the “dome” pictures when you have finished one step of the journey.
• “Taking a short trip before attempting long voyages, if possible, is recommended. This will help the person get used to traveling and give you the opportunity to see plan ahead for possible areas of difficulty.
• Also, if you use the travel book system, it will help the person make a connection between the travel book and any impending travel in the future.
• Travel environments such as airports and train stations are areas that involve lots of waiting. “Teaching the individual the “waiting” skill before traveling (if he or she does not already have it) will make your life and theirs much easier. Make or find a picture or an icon that will represent “waiting” to your child, such as a line drawing of a “stick” person sitting in a chair, with the face of a clock next to it. Write “waiting” clearly on the card. Glue to cardboard, laminate it and place a piece of Velcro somewhere on it. Next, make sure you have picture of whatever items your child usually requests or wants (favorite food, toy, ride in the car) backed with Velcro. The next time he or she requests the item, place the corresponding item on the Velcro strip on the waiting board and say “We’re Waiting” and set a timer for how long you think the person will wait – for some this will be 10 seconds, for others a few minutes.
• When the timer goes off, immediately give the requested item, and say, “Thank you for waiting.” Do this, lengthening the amount of time the person needs to wait. Eventually, he or she will get the concept.
(2) PREPARING THE ENVIRONMENT: Some preparations can be made ahead of time for the different environments and means of transport you will be using. Most people and companies in the field of tourism are willing to help to ensure a positive environment for all their customers and guests. Here are some tips:
• *If you travel in a hotel, it is a good idea to call ahead and ask for a quiet room. You may wish to explain about the person’s behavior if there is a likelihood of him or her exhibiting them in the public part of the hotel. Same with a friend or relative’s home. It can be a bit discourting for everyone concerned if your child or adolescent takes his clothes off and races through your friend’s home stark naked.
• If you are traveling by plane, call the airlines as far in advance as you can, and tell them you will be traveling with someone who has special needs. You can also have “special assistance coordinators.” You may wish to explain about the person’s needs and some of the behaviors that may affect other travelers, such as rocking in their seat. If the person is a rock.

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Permanent medication collection boxes are available at the locations listed inside to help reduce these statistics:

- 50% of people who abuse prescription opioids abuse friends or relatives.
- In 1 high school student uses prescription drugs in our people, somewhere, with a different

Check out our website www.lifeinbucks.org and join our email list to receive updates on monthly parent/professional workshop trainings, youth events, and family community events.

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Bucks LIFE On Social Media

Twitter: @AccessServicesPA Facebook: www.facebook.com/accessservices Instagram: @accessservespa

Bucks LIFE and Access Services collaborate to provide a new feature called Bucks LIFE On. Check out our website www.lifeinbucks.org and join our email list to receive updates on monthly parent/professional workshop trainings, youth events, and family community events.

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Summer Activity for 8th, 9th and 10th Graders

Is your child starting to wonder "What do I want to do when I get older?"
Middle Bucks Institute of Technology (MBIT) offers Exploration Courses that provide students with hands-on learning in a variety of career settings.