

Tips and Tricks for Travelling with your ASD Kiddos

By Dawn O'Brien

Being a parent to a child (or children) gifted with Autism can offer its challenges. One thing most families eventually have to do is travel in the car. Whether it's just a few hours to Grandmas house or a cross country trek it can be done. Here are some tried and tested tips from parents just like you!

Travel at Night

Believe it or not the number one tip I was given by parents is to travel at night if you can. Our ASD kiddos thrive on their daily routine and traveling at night disrupt that routine as little as possible. It gives them the chance to sleep through most, if not all of your trip. If night travel is just not possible then let's explore how to make day travel that much more pleasant.

Practice and Roll Play

Another great tip I was given is to practice and Roll Play what your child will expect during and at the end of your travels. Start setting aside some time every day to talk with your child about the trip. Talk about how you are travelling, where you are going, what you will see along the way and most importantly what awaits you at your destination. If you are going to see family members or friends showing your child daily pictures of these people will be very helpful. Google pictures of the hotel and the room you will be staying in is a great way to prepare for their night away and will help to ease their anxiety. If you will be staying in a hotel and sharing a room, best to start practicing ahead of time. Talk about what it will be like to walk into the hotel, how you will all be sharing a room. You can make it even more fun by having everyone sleep in the living room at home so they get the idea that it can be a lot of fun. Another suggestion is to bring as much of your child's bedding with you as possible, especially their pillow and blanket/comforter. These home comforts could go a long way to help settle your child in the new environment.

Call Ahead

Many parents have a hard time or are reluctant to tell people that their child is Autistic. In the case of travelling sharing this knowledge can go a long way to making your trip easier. Call Ahead to the places you will be going and let them know that you are travelling with a child on the autism spectrum. Many places like restaurants, hotels and tourist spots are happy to accommodate our kiddos. They can offer quite eating areas, tours with fewer distractions or quiet rooms where you can go as a family and relax. Make sure to bring support as the more people on your journeys who understand your child the better.

Identification

One thing that makes many ASD parents hesitant to travel is the tendency of Autistic children to wander off. Make sure your child has proper identification on their person at all times. A medical necklace or bracelet with all the contact information on it is incredibly important. If your kiddo has sensory issues you can always use other methods like sewing their name and information into their travel clothes or an ID tag on a zipper pull or on their shoe laces. Having your child decked out in Autism symbol clothing is another way to get peoples attention and have them look more closely at your child should you become separated.

Their Favorite Things

As any parent can tell you our children are very attached to certain items. For an Autistic child this attachment can be of even greater significance. Making sure to pack your child's favorite things can go a long way to making them feel more comfortable in a strange and unfamiliar place. A few days ahead of time start practicing packing. This allows your child to feel in control of what items are going and will ensure no items are missed. For ease of packing small items like legos, use tackle boxes. These are a wonderful way to store and carry Lego. It also makes it easier to find the pieces and colours you are looking for. Tackle boxes are also great for dolls and their clothes and accessories. Pack as many snacks and distractors as you can. We call these "soothers". Portable DVD player and DVD's, I Pad loaded with games and tv shows and even an MP3 player with all their favorite music.

Another great idea is a bag full of new, wrapped items from the dollar store. You can hand them out every 40 mins or so as a distractor or for good behaviour. A lot of fun and peace can be had from a one dollar item.

Take lots of Breaks

Being in a car all day is a long time for anyone. Make sure you take lots of Breaks along the way. If you know there are interesting things to see on the way make sure to include these places in your trip. Having these small stops to talk about and look forward to is a great way to add fun (and bathroom breaks) to your journey.

I hope these tips will help make your trip a happier, safer and most importantly a more comfortable time. Oh, one more tip, buy an extra charger for all your electronics. Having your I Pad run out of battery half way through your trip is no fun for anyone!