
Traveling With Your Autistic Child

A planning checklist for trips big and small. The goal isn't a perfect vacation — it's a doable one. Plan the hard moments before they happen, pack the familiar, and lower the bar for what counts as success.

■ Before you go

- ☐ Make a simple social story about the trip
A few photos in order — the car or airport, where you'll sleep, who you'll see, coming home. Read it together for a week or so before you leave.
- ☐ Show them where you're going
Photos of the hotel room, grandma's house, the beach. Familiar-before-arrival is the whole trick.
- ☐ Plan sensory breaks into the schedule
One outing per day, then recovery time. An empty afternoon is a feature, not a failure.
- ☐ Keep home routines portable
Same bedtime steps, same cup, same book. The routine can travel even when the bedroom doesn't.
- ☐ Decide your exit plan for each outing
Know how you'd leave early before you arrive. You may never use it — knowing it exists changes how the day feels.
- ☐ If flying: ask the airline and airport what help they offer
Accommodations for families with disabilities often exist, but you usually have to ask ahead of time.

■ Packing — the comfort & sensory kit

- ☐ Headphones or ear defenders
- ☐ The comfort item — and, if one exists, its backup twin
- ☐ Fidgets and chewables, if your child uses them
- ☐ Tablet, charger, and favorites downloaded — don't count on wifi
- ☐ Snacks they reliably eat (more than seems reasonable)
- ☐ Something that smells like home — a small blanket or their own pillowcase
- ☐ Their own cup or water bottle
- ☐ One small new surprise, saved for the hardest stretch of the day

Our child's must-not-forget items: _____

■ Packing — the practical bag

- ☐ Medications, plus a note of doses and times
- ☐ Insurance cards and any medical information sheet
- ☐ A full change of clothes in the day bag, not the suitcase
- ☐ Wipes and a few zip-top bags — future you says thanks
- ☐ A current photo of your child, printed and on your phone
- ☐ ID your child can carry — a card in a pocket, a tag on a shoe, whatever works for your family

■ On the day

- ☐ Leave more time than seems reasonable
A rushed transition is a hard transition. Buy back the margin.
- ☐ Feed everyone before the hard part
- ☐ Narrate what's next in short sentences
"First security. Then the gate. Then the plane."
- ☐ Offer the headphones before the noise, not after
- ☐ Take the break at the first early-warning sign, not the third
- ☐ Count the wins out loud — theirs and yours

■ Our scripts — written before we need them

The hardest sentences to compose are the ones you need mid-meltdown at a check-in desk. Draft yours now, in your own words.

Hotel check-in — what we'll ask for (quiet floor, away from the elevator...):

Flight or long drive — our plan for the hardest moment:

If a stranger stares or comments — what we'll say (or calmly not say):
