

Top Tips for Air Travel

Before:

- Where possible encourage involvement in the planning and preparation, in order to create a sense of control. For example, the choice of suitcase and picking out what items to take.
- Contact your departure airport and tour operator ahead of your journey to ask about special assistance or adjustments that can be made. For example, there may be an early check in process, a way to skip the queue, preference for sunflower lanyard wearers.
- Create a collage of all the fun things you can do when you are at your airport, on the plane and at the destination. You could cut up holiday brochures or download images from the internet.
- Have a practice run of the airport journey and make a note of the potential things which may have a negative impact.
- Prepare as best you can by showing YouTube videos of airports, planes, security, baggage collection etc. This will help create a sense of what to expect.
- Consider how far in advance you are preparing your friend or loved one. It's good in most situations to try and prepare people as early as possible, however for some autistic people planning too far in advance can cause unnecessary stress.
- Visual stories are a great tool for preparation. This can help break down parts of the journey or explain and help anticipate different feelings they may experience when travelling e.g. ears popping when flying or travel sickness.
- Pack a toolkit of ear defenders/headphones, sunglasses, fidget toys... whatever will promote wellbeing.
- Consider things you can do which will make the journey easier like removing passport covers beforehand, weighing luggage and not wearing belts.
- Consider practicing a body search at home to prepare in case this happens.
- Plan ahead what you will be doing in between security and boarding. Most airports have websites where you can check out what is available.
- Take visual countdowns with you. These could be used when you are preparing the person to board the plane for example or when the flight is coming to an end.

During:

- When boarding the plane, if there are no special measures regarding queuing, consider going to the back of the queue so you don't have the pressure of people behind you.
- Communicate with the staff on board as to how they can best support you during the flight.
- Establish a routine for the flight, where possible, to provide some level of predictability for example games, dinner, film, toilet, sleeping.
- Have activities / games planned for during the flight.
- Make sure that if iPads and gadgets are relied upon that they're fully charged and you have a charger with you.

After:

- It may be possible to leave the plane first to reduce waiting to get through the arrival gates. It is worth asking the question before you fly.
- Be prepared to wait for baggage in arrivals by packing a favourite treat in your hand luggage or playing a game such as eye spy.
- The unpredictability of walking through the arrival gates into a new country can cause a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Prepare ahead by printing off pictures of the arrival airport.
- If you are travelling somewhere hot, consider the impact the temperature change may have by packing a hand held fan or a change of clothes.