

Tips for Holiday Travel

A little planning goes a long way: individuals with autism and their families get ready for holiday travel

Holidays are the busiest time of year to travel by plane. Preparing a child, teenager or adult with autism spectrum disorder for plane travel, and new security techniques used at airport security checkpoints, can make a huge difference in making plane travel a more enjoyable experience for all involved.

Start by providing the airline with advanced information. Offer to email or fax information to let them know you will be traveling with an individual with autism and the challenges the individual may face on travel day. A good place to start is to prepare a one page document with information stating the diagnosis, any allergies or medications, and other special information (i.e. communication ability).

Persons with autism should always carry identification. Make sure an ID tag is attached somewhere on the individual. You can order medical bracelets, necklaces and tags to attach to shoe laces. If the individual carries a cell phone, activate the GPS device as a safety precaution. Adult passengers (18 and over) are required to show a U.S. federal or state-issued photo ID that contains the following: name, date of birth, gender, expiration date and a tamper-resistant feature in order to be allowed to go through the checkpoint and onto their flight. Acceptable identification includes: Drivers Licenses or other state photo identification cards issued by Department of Motor Vehicles.

To help prepare the individual for the trip, bring a special item to make him or her feel more comfortable. A favorite electronic device or book can help focus the individual during travel days, which are often filled with lots of waiting, Remember to rehearse or discuss the travel plans with the individual prior to the travel day. Having special foods readily available, rather than standing in long lines for food, will help things go smoothly.

Traveling by Plane

“I called the airport and explained that my 6-year-old son Marcel has autism and had never flown before and we were planning a trip in December. Before our travel day, airport personnel allowed my son to do a simulation of what would happen when he went through security checkpoint step by step. This made all the difference for my son. If you can't do a practice run, at the very least, alert security about your child's issues.”

Marcy Mullins, Cincinnati, Ohio

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): Getting Through the Security Process!

Every individual has to be screened regardless of age or disability before going through an airport security checkpoint. Security techniques include: walk through metal detectors, Advanced Imaging Technology (ITA), pat-downs and other types of security measures. Be sure to check the TSA website for airport listings and the techniques being used: www.tsa.gov.

What triggers a pat-down?

Pat-downs are used to resolve alarms at the checkpoint, including those triggered by metal detectors and AIT units. Pat-downs are also used when a person opts out of AIT screening in order to detect potentially dangerous and prohibited items. Because pat-downs are specifically used to resolve alarms and prevent dangerous items from going on a plane, the vast majority of passengers will not receive a pat-down at the checkpoint.

“Family members or traveling companions can advise Security Officers when they are traveling with someone who has a hidden disability, which may cause that person to move a little slower, become agitated easily and/or need additional assistance.”

- TSA website www.tsa.gov

Parents or guardians of children with disabilities should...

- Inform the Security Officer if the child has any special needs or medical devices.
- Inform the Security Officer if you think the child may become upset during the screening process as a result of their disability.
- Offer suggestions on how to best accomplish the screening to minimize any confusion or outburst for the child.
- Ask the Security Officer for assistance during the process by helping you put your and the child's carry-on items on the X-ray belt.
- Know that at no time during the screening process will you be separated from your child.
- Know that if a private screening is required, you should escort and remain with your child during the private screening process.
- Tell the Security Officer what are your child's abilities are. For example: can the child stand slightly away from equipment to be handwanded, walk through the metal detector, or need to be carried through the metal detector by the parent/guardian.

- Know that at no time should the Security Officer remove your child from his/her mobility aid (wheelchair or scooter). You are responsible for removing your child from his/her equipment at your discretion to accomplish screening.
- Know that if your child is unable to walk or stand, the Security Officer will conduct a pat-down search of your child while he/she remains in their mobility aid, as well as a visual and physical inspection of their equipment.

Other Resources on Travel and Autism

Autism Speaks Community Connections: Travel Tips for Individuals with Autism
www.autismspeaks.org/community/family_services/travel.php

You can write TSA with your Suggestions or Complaints at:

<https://contact.tsa.dhs.gov/DynaForm.aspx?FormID=20>

E-mail: tsa-contactcenter@dhs.gov

Phone: 1-866-289-9673

Download an app to your mobile phone that tells you in real time the waiting time at security checkpoints.

Visit the Autism Speaks [Resource Guide](#). We welcome [new submissions](#) as we continue to build the National Resource Guide of Autism Resources.

Tell us about your travel experience! E-mail us at familyservices@autismspeaks.org.