

Tips for Visiting New Places and Spaces

Prepare

Both children and adults with ASD benefit from explicit preparation for the environment and events that will occur. Take some time to prepare *before* visiting new places.

- Take advantage of what you can learn about venues from other parents who have visited. Check the MAIER Family Partnership *Places and Spaces Directory* to review the listing, if available, and note parent suggestions if offered.
- Visit the websites of chosen places and spaces. If a map of the venue is available, be sure to locate bathrooms, entry and exits, eating areas, and potential quiet spaces. You can map out your visit ahead of time, noting specific areas or exhibits of interest, and those that may be best to avoid.
- If photos are available online, share these with your child ahead of time. Some museums and other public spaces are now including social stories and other visual supports you can download from their websites- take advantage of these if you can!
- If a social narrative or visitor guide is not available, you can develop one of your own. Download photos from venue websites, particularly the areas you plan to visit, and print copies to make a “book” for your child.
- Share this with your child over the days before, the day of, and after the planned visit. Talk about the visit. Role-play expected scenarios. However, consider your child’s disposition and tolerance to allow for enough practice, but not increase their anxiety.
- Be sure to pack a favorite toy, soothing items, fidget toys, and favorite snacks.

Practice, practice, practice!

Gaining experience attending the chosen place when the risks are lower can help create a safe space to explore, experiment, and adapt to the new environment.

- Check to see if the chosen place has special times or hours for those with family members with autism or other special needs. This also offers you the opportunity to get to know the staff at a quieter time and for them to get to know your family. Listings in MAIER’s *Places and Spaces Directory* will note these times if available.
- If special times are not offered, call ahead to find out the days and times when crowds are generally smaller or less noisy to plan your visit if possible.
- Start with shorter but more frequent visits if possible. Be sure to plan for breaks and down time from activity.
- Consider taking along headphones or earplugs if your child is sensitive to noise.
- Bring your child’s communication supports- visual schedules, communication cards, etc.
- Be sure to praise your child for behavior you want to reinforce. Consider using tokens or other small items as a reward(s) for acceptable behaviors, positive interactions, etc.
- Be flexible in how your child participates- it may not be what is expected, but a good alternative!

Mainstream experience

Your time spent in preparation and practice with your child can create the confidence to attend places during busier, normal hours. Prepare for mainstream visits as suggested above, and consider these additional suggestions before you venture out.

Since children with ASD have a tendency to wander, there is a potential for your child to become separated from you. Some parents use special ID tags for shoelaces or zipper pulls, or

Medical Alert bracelets with your essential contact information. You can order ID tags online or at medical supply stores (e.g., <https://www.zoobearsmedicalid.com/> and <http://www.medicalert.org/product/catalog/medical-ids/youth-kids>)

Exploring new places and spaces in your community opens up the world of learning to your child as well. What can your child learn from museum exhibits, library programs, and outdoor adventures? What life skills can you practice while interacting with staff and other visitors? What new interests may be sparked for your family members? As you and your family experience successful excursions, you will gain the confidence to try new ones. Happy explorations!