



## **Planning A Day Out or A Vacation**

Planning day trips or vacations can be challenging when raising children with a mental health diagnosis. As a parent/caregiver, we know that there is a level of fear or anxiousness that comes with the “What Ifs”. The tips listed below are based on research from different Mental Health Advocacy programs and from those with their own experiences. Of course, planning looks different for everyone, but consider this a starting point.

**Here are some tips to help you get on the move and to having a great time:**

### **1. Research! Research! And research some more!**

- ✓ Make calls & check online. Do they offer hours that are sensory friendly? These hours would provide smaller crowds, noise reduction, and other accommodations. Movie theatres, zoos, aquariums, theme parks, and other places offer a link on their websites for ADA services. On these links, you can find information on what they offer, where to go to get those services, and other information.



### **2. Planning Options**

- ✓ While doing your research, plan how you'll get there. Choose your route. If it's a long driving trip, plan for needed stops and food choices. If you are flying, plan how you'll navigate airports and what you'll fit into your suitcases.
- ✓ Make lists of items you'll need to bring with you. It's best to have double the items and not need them.
- ✓ Make a schedule around business hours, travel time, and break times.
- ✓ Plan rest! To have fun with this, you can include your child(ren) in this by helping them learn some age-appropriate self-care routines. If it's a day trip, plan for the time when you get home to allow everyone a chance to decompress.

### **3. Call your child's doctor.**

- ✓ If going on long trips (a few days, a week, or longer), it's best to call or have a visit. Your pediatrician can provide tips or other tools you'd need to make your trip easier.
- ✓ Get refills. If your child is on any medication, now is the time to ensure you have enough for your trip.

### **4. Provide warnings.**

- ✓ Allow your child(ren) to participate in planning. Listen to their wishes or concerns. When they help you make a schedule or decide activities, they will recall what was discussed and planned.
- ✓ Schedules – Make a schedule of events. When are you leaving? What you'll do on arrival? What will you do when you are there? Put down events or shows you want to attend. When are you leaving?
- ✓ Stick to the schedule as much as you can. We can't plan for the unexpected, but as parents/caregivers you can do your best to stay on track.



### **5. Make a "Go Bag"**

- ✓ The bag should be easy to access for your child. Use a backpack or fanny pack that he/she can carry comfortably.
- ✓ Bring a favorite water bottle to stay hydrated and bring snacks to prevent hunger crashes during the day or trip.
- ✓ Items that can be included: noise cancelling earbuds or headphones, tablet for music or games or movies, fidget toys, favorite toy or stuffed animal or blanket
- ✓ Small first aid kit or toiletry items such as wipes, hand sanitizer, Kleenexes, or other needs.
- ✓ Some locations may be part of an advocacy program for those with disabilities, mental illnesses, or sensory issues. These programs will often provide their own sensory bag for the location to use. You'd return this bag back to the desk or office when you leave.



#### **6. *Plan a safe space or exit strategy.***

- ✓ No one enjoys meltdowns in large crowds. Sometimes, having all eyes on you can make matters worse. When doing your research, ask about the least crowded areas or best places to go for some privacy. Some places offer a quiet room/family room. These rooms include sensory friendly activities.
- ✓ Allowing short breaks will help to prevent overstimulation. If your child wants to plan their own breaks or can communicate when he/she needs a break, allow them that opportunity. If he/she cannot communicate that need yet, that's okay too. Either way, allow an adult to go with him/her. These breaks can include walks, bathroom breaks, or finding somewhere to sit away from the crowd. These breaks are a good time to utilize your "go-bag".