

## **WHAT TO DO IN THE HOLIDAYS..... ways to make New Places More Fun for children**

With school holidays HERE, lots of questions have been asked about autism and some of the things that can make holidays fun for EVERYONE!!!

Parents have chatted about some of challenges of taking a child on holiday who is anxious about new places or finds it difficult to meet people they may not know very well. This may make family events overseas or those big get togethers a bit more confusing resulting in a stressful situation for everyone. Not what you want on your holiday or family celebration at all....I was talking about wedding celebrations overseas for a family and how upsetting the different environment, routine, noise levels, and big gathering of a few hundred people was for this young child with ASD. Here is some information that could be helpful for everyone these holidays.....

If you are travelling and your young child is anxious it may be helpful to prepare for the journey. Check out if the planes, long car trips, or buses will have crowds, noise, or wait times. Remember to pack things that could help your child be able to tolerate the sensory difficulties they may encounter. This could include, noise reducing headphones, their favourite music, ipad, books, comics, magazines to read (yes, still OK to take despite the technology), a sensory toy they can keep with them for comfort, or sun shades and eye patches for reducing bright lights if needed.

Help children to understand what is expected in different parts of the journey (e.g., airports, boarding and getting off planes or cruise boats), being in different modes of transport, and rules like putting their seat belt on; sleeping while seated in the plane, and when to ask for help like going to the toilet.

Meeting people children do not know very well can be confusing in a new situation and the social rules can be new and sometimes this is a difficult combination for anyone on the spectrum. Discussing this with your therapists is a good idea and how to put in strategies to make it clearer what to expect. This makes new and confusing events more predictable for your child. It reduces their anxiety and helps them to understand what is expected of them.

If you have a wedding to attend or a ceremony that has a set of sequences that might not be that easy for a child to understand as they are not too familiar with the process, going over it will be very important for them. They may need to know they are expected to sit quietly, or sit without any electronics, and may need to answer social questions that they can better navigate if they have some preparation before-hand.

Importantly, having new experiences helps everyone to learn new skills including those who are anxious about it or avoidant of it. With some planning, practice, and informed support you can enjoy these events and everyone can be relaxed and enjoy the event and holiday that you have been looking forward to.

The list is endless and can be discussed with your intervention therapists as soon as you have a holiday plan or big event coming up.

Happy holidays or celebrations to all. And to all the mums and dads... congratulations....we have made it to Term 3 this year!!! This is a celebration in itself and we all need a pat on the back and some time to look after ourselves as well as our families so don't forget to make some time for yourselves this holiday!

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