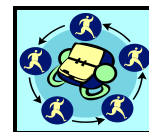






## Summer Survival Tips



### **Pre-Activity Planning Tips**

A little summer pre-planning can go a long way in maximizing summer benefits for any family—especially families living with autism or other disabilities. Here are 5 helpful tips for thinking about and planning your summer months.

-  **Plan ahead!** The key is not to let summer sneak up on you, and overwhelm you in the process. You know summer's coming, so commit to making it a great experience for everyone involved instead of a stress-fest for your family. Begin looking into options in your area such as camps, community events, local attractions, parks, and other options that may be available. There are many things that are free or low cost if you take the time to look for them. Just exploring the variety of parks and playgrounds in your area can make for great inexpensive fun. Most larger communities have recreation departments that offer summer activities ranging from sports to art to science.
  
-  **Ensure adequate support for your child.** Make sure whatever activities you choose for your child include adequate support for him/her to have a successful experience. There can be a tendency to think that because summer activities don't involve "academics," children with autism and other disabilities won't need as much support. The reality is that these kids need support to navigate the social complexities and expectations of seasonal environments such as camp, Vacation Bible School, local recreation events, etc. Supports vary according to the needs of each child, but it is best to determine potential needs and accommodations ahead of time to ensure a positive and productive experience for your child, and less worry for you.
  
-  **Figure out a schedule that is workable for everyone involved.** Sometimes in the quest to make sure everyone has things to do, we end up turning ourselves into crazed taxi drivers all summer long. Determine how much time you want to be at home versus other places; and don't go crazy planning something every minute. As much as kids may think they need to be doing something 24-7, there is great benefit to them having some downtime as well. Don't plan so much in your summer schedule that there isn't free time and relaxation.
  
-  **ALL kids need a break from the hectic schedule of the school year!** Some parents of children with autism or other disabilities feel that they need to make every moment therapeutic, or have their child involved in some kind of activity or program each day. I have met many families over the years who become stressed at the thought of their child not being in school for the summer. Some of the BEST learning for kids takes place outside the walls of the classroom. You may have been conditioned to believe that what your child needs only happens in a school building, or that you can't possibly provide the same benefits outside a school setting. Nothing could be further from the truth! Allow your child with autism to experience the summer just like other kids—and watch them blossom in the process.



**Make time for yourself.** All parents need breaks and time to themselves throughout the summer. The previous tips will help accomplish reduced stress for parents by planning ahead for structured activities outside the home, and developing a workable time schedule for those things to happen. Parents also need to allow some time to do things you want/need to do, instead of feeling like you have to entertain your kids all day. Determining a workable schedule that includes time at home together and time doing other activities will help everyone stay sane—most importantly you!

## **Playground/Outside Tips**

Just like every other child, children with autism react differently and enjoy different activities on the playground. However, we can take some information about the senses and make some general observations of what should go into a playground that actively welcomes children with autism.

- ☀ The playground should be fenced so that when a child feels the need to flee from over-stimulation, he isn't able to leave the area.
- ☀ The playground should include nature: gardens, grassy areas, trees, etc. Recent studies from University of Illinois found that a walk in nature helps children with ADHD stay attentive.
- ☀ The safety surfacing must meet or exceed all guidelines. Children, who do not feel their senses strongly, may want to climb as high as they can go and jump off. The intense fall enables them to feel the impact. They may not recognize the danger so it is important that the safety surfacing material is maintained on a regular basis.
- ☀ There should be quiet areas where a child may go to regroup when she is over stimulated. This quiet area can be made through landscaping or the use of playground equipment, such as a playhouse.
- ☀ Playground equipment that swings, goes around in circles, and enables children to climb and jump. These activities help children with both their vestibular and proprioceptive systems.
- ☀ There should be equipment such as monkey bars where a child can hang. This puts pressure on their muscles and joints and helps to develop the proprioceptive system.
- ☀ There should be play activities that the child can do by himself, while keeping out of the major line of traffic. Play panels such as tic-tac -toe, or a marble maze, often can meet this need.
- ☀ Children with autism often need to work on where their body is in space. Crawling through tunnels is a good activity for this. It may be important to have windows in the tunnels for the caregiver to watch and provide assistance if needed.





## **Traveling Tips**

Simple, straightforward lists or picture schedules help many children with autism.



Older children and those with Asperger syndrome may benefit from a simple list of words or phrases.

If pictures are used, they can be simple drawings or picture icons created with a commercial picture makers such as [Boardmaker®](#). Many school districts and public libraries have such programs. Using a list or picture schedule, the child can actually see what is next by looking at the list. This technique can be applied to preparing for a trip as well.



### A Picture Schedule for Travel Preparation

The following items could be included in the picture schedule or pre-travel list. Exact items, of course, should be used to represent the steps that the child's family will take.

- Packing the suitcase
- Taking the pets to the kennel
- Watering the plants
- Preparing a cooler
- Packing the car

Some children will do well with their own packing list of suitcase items. This list could be for the clothes and toiletries they will need. It could also be for the activity bag that the child will take.



### Communicating the Timeline of the Trip

Using an individual schedule will help the child understand just how long the trip will be. It could also be used prior to the trip to track the time before the actual travel. An individual calendar can be a pocket-sized calendar that belongs only to the child; a larger calendar posted on the wall, a bulletin board, or refrigerator; or a simple photocopy of that month's page from an existing calendar.

The calendar should include clear information:

- The dates included in the trip
- The mode of travel
- The destination
- The people who will be traveling or those who will be at the destination

The thing to keep in mind is that the child needs visual information, with minimal surprises. Using a list or pictures to communicate travel plans is simply building on existing communication practices. Either method can be the way to minimize the child's frustration.





**NDCPD** is a University Center of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research and Services. It is part of a network of similar programs at universities throughout the United States.

**Our mission...**To provide leadership and innovation that advances the state-of-the-art and empower people with disabilities to challenge expectations, achieve personal goals and be included in all aspects of community life.

**Vision Statement...**We believe that people with disabilities have the same rights as all citizens. We believe that people with disabilities who receive publicly funded services have the right to expect that those services appropriately promote their independence, productivity, integration and inclusion. Furthermore, we believe that the public expects that these services will be provided in an effective manner.



## Resources

Retrieved from: [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Mara\\_Kaplan](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Mara_Kaplan)

Retrieved from: [Travel With an Autistic Child http://specialneedsparenting.suite101.com/article.cfm/travel-with-autistic-child#ixzz0qDRkBcpm](http://specialneedsparenting.suite101.com/article.cfm/travel-with-autistic-child#ixzz0qDRkBcpm)

Retrieved from: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/summers-coming-5-helpful-tips-for-parents.html>

Funding for this project was provided by Congressionally Directed Funding through the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Families and Children #90XP0299