

Travel tips for parents looking after individuals with FASD

When planning a trip by plane, consider:

- Try to organise travel times to best suit sleep patterns so as to avoid over tiredness as the excitement of the journey and reduced sleep are bound to increase the likelihood of meltdowns etc;
- Always try to be early and allow yourself more time than necessary. The less stress you put yourself under, the calmer you can stay and that will be better for the children and put them under less stress;
- Hidden disability lanyards are a discreet way of letting people know that a person has a disability <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/>
Airline staff are aware of these and will provide help often without having to ask. Some teenagers may not think it is cool for them to wear these, but they might be okay with you wearing them or just taking the card off of the lanyard;
- Letting the airline know you have a child/ren with FASD. You do not have to provide the airline with advance notice of your intent to travel or disability, but it will give the airline more time to prepare and ensure any requests are provided for.
- Ensure that you create real expectations for the children and that they are as well versed about what is going to happen as can possibly be. This will hopefully reduce any anxiety they will be suffering;
- Do you want to be near the aircraft toilet or is that a distraction on a long trip?
- Your child will have a preference in wanting to sit on the aisle or window seat, so pre-book seats to make sure there are no disappointments on embarkation;
- If your child has sensory issues arrange to leave getting on the plane last, so everyone is settled when you get on and see if you can be the first to get off or last;
- Sitting next to a stranger can be upsetting – one teenager had a woman breastfeeding her child in the seat next to him which he was extremely uncomfortable with;
- Have headphones to limit stimuli;
- Food, make sure you have appropriate food choices available or special dietary requirements as hunger, boredom and disappointment are sure fire way to have a failure;
- Food options – many children have a problem with preservatives or food allergies – contact the airline ahead of time or arrange to take your own food on if they are unable to provide what is required;
- Have something to suck or chew on for take-off and landings;
- Entertainment – always have lots of options of entertainment to pass the time and to use as a distraction

- don't rely on plane entertainment as an option as it often works poorly and is frustrating for them – ensure all devices are fully charged!
- They may not listen to the safety advice by staff that is played on the screen, get them to look at the picture card and go through it with them.

Tips for travelling by car:

- Start preparing them for the trip to come at least a week before, remind them where they are going and what you will be doing;
- Be prepared to postpone leaving until the following day if you can see it is not going to work;
- Plan with your child what games they will play, music and screen time with limits on the amount of screen time they can have;
- Music might need to be agreed before you leave with each person in the car having a choice of music played. Earphones might be the solution – often in this case the time needs to be agreed to or you have control of the volume, as loud music in their ear consistently can cause damage;
- Pick the best time of the day for sleep patterns to leave;
- Make sure you have plenty of stops on the way – try and plan for when and where you will stop as you will be constantly *asked when are we going to stop*;
- If your child has sensory issues have headphones and screen over the window – darker the better (this is really important to reduce extra stimulation)
- Have plenty of appropriate snacks available;
- Positioning where your child sits is important, if they are in the back, they may want to sit in the middle to look out of the front window;

Tips for boat cruises:

- Ensure all cabin staff know your child has a disability;
- Design a lanyard they can wear that has your name and cabin number in case they get lost;
- Depending on your child they might want to go to the activity programs provided on ships – make sure all staff understand your child has FASD and give some samples of what to do in case they get upset;
- As always around pools you will need to have good pool side supervision, also around the deck areas;
- Let them know of any ports you will be stopping at, have a timetable and/or a map in your room showing the stops, where they are, if there are excursions when you arrive, where you will be going, what you will be doing, what time you leave on the excursion, what time you get back, what time the ship leaves that port and when you reach your destination. Having a pre-printed planner that can just be filled in as needed would be very helpful.
- Generally, most children go to the buffet as there is more variety. Seeing all of this wonderful food and all of these other children eating it, can be a problem if your child has food allergies or reactions to preservatives. Prep them about what they can and can't have. If this becomes too much for them



and meals are a constant meltdown, arrange to have meals in your cabin – possibly do that from the start if you think it will be an issue, they then won't know what is available;

- Try as much as possible to keep to some routines like bed time, breakfast, lunch, dinner and getting up times;
- Let them know the day before what will be happening the next day;
- Take card and other games they like with you. If you see them getting overwhelmed and overstimulated, have a day in the cabin playing games; if you have a child who needs exercise to regulate, there are gyms and walking/running decks that they can use, then bring them back to the cabin.

Tips for school camps:

- Start preparing your child at least two weeks before they go;
- Go through the itinerary that is planned for the camp;
- Provide them with a book that has the itinerary in but make sure they know that this can change and the camp leader will let them know;
- Make sure the people taking care of them totally understand their needs and FASD;
- Write everything down for staff – how to get their attention, sensory issues, what to do if they get overwhelmed;
- Take photos of the clothes that are packed to help remember what they had and what they should come home with. Give these photos to the leaders of the camp as well;
- Make sure staff know of any food allergies;
- Give staff your contact details;
- Let your child know it is okay to contact you at any time;
- Send plenty of updates from home especially on the pets if you have them;
- If they are travelling a distance, pack some appropriate snacks for them.

Below is a sample of printed paper, laminated cards punched at the top and put through a key ring. These reminders from you and regular contact from you, gives them security.

