

Preparing for busy environments - Sensory

Helpful Tips:

Your child may find being in busy environments such as shops or train stations challenging.

- Become a “sensory detective” and find out which environments your child can or cannot tolerate.
- Try and work out the triggers which could cause your child to become overwhelmed and unhappy.
- Keep a diary of this information e.g. what fabrics your child cannot tolerate (clothes shopping),
- Always ask yourself how necessary the visit is and are there any alternatives?

Preparing your child for a busy environment:

Some families have found these strategies and activities useful. Observe your child when completing these. Stop if your child becomes anxious or distressed.

- Discuss with your child or show them a photograph of the environment you are planning to go to e.g. a shop, party.
- Visual prompts and timetables are useful resources e.g. having a now and next board to reinforce that the trip will at some point end.
- Tell them a social story about this event. See <http://www.autism.org.uk/17368> for an example.
- Role play or act out trips / events at home to prepare your child beforehand.
- Learning some relaxation techniques may be helpful such as deep breathing, deep pressure calming activities that include heavy or resistive work to muscles, bear hug, lifting / pulling or pushing an appropriate heavy object a few times or standing press ups against the wall.
- Provide firm boundaries of expected behaviours.
- For a shopping trip a list with pictures can help keep your child on task
- Your child may need to have a stress scale to hand e.g. a green (I'm feeling ok), amber (I'm getting upset), red (I need help).
- Some of these items may help your child earmuffs, a personal music device, earplugs, sunglasses, baseball cap, timers, fiddle toys.
- Be aware of your child's tolerance to busy environments and they may only be able to manage one busy activity in a day. You may have to offer a wind down, calming session afterwards.
- Further information on visiting specific places e.g. the dentist is available on www.autism.org.uk

