

Are We There Yet? Family Vacations with Autistic Children

Although planning a family vacation with children may make any parents pull out his or her hair, it can be a rewarding experience for everyone in the end. It is no different if you have an autistic child in the family. The important thing to remember is that you need to be prepared for whatever life throws your way. To an autistic child, vacations can be scary and confusing, or they can be a great learning experience, leaving behind wonderful memories the entire family can enjoy.

First, choose your location based on your autistic child's needs. For example, if he or she is sensitive to sound, an amusement park is probably not the best idea. Quieter vacations are possible at small beaches and by going camping. Overall, you should be able to find a location that everyone in the family enjoys. Once there, plan out your days accordingly. For example, you may want to see attractions very early or late in the day to avoid crowds. You also might want to consider taking your vacation during the off-season, if you children's school work will not be disrupted. These gives your autistic child more comfort if he or she is nervous in crowded situations, and provides you with piece of mind. When choosing a location, also note how far it is from you home. How will you get there? If you have to deal with an airport, remember that security may have to touch your child and be prepared for this.

Choose a location and activities that everyone can enjoy, but also that provide learning and social interaction opportunities for your autistic child. For example, a child that does not like touch sensations may enjoy the soft sands of a beach, and the waves can provide a very different kind of feeling for him or her. Being outside, a beach is also a great place for your child to yell without disrupting others. Children who are normally non-responsive may benefit from a museum , where they can ask questions and you can ask questions of them.

Remember that most people on vacation at the location you choose will have never dealt with autism before. Try to be understanding of their ignorance-but also stick up for your child if he or she is being treated unfairly. Know your child's constitutional laws, and also be willing to compromise. For example, if a restaurant is reluctant to serve you after your child caused a scene there last night, explain the situation and ask if it would be possible to take your food to go, even if this is normally not done. Try not to be rude to people; staring often happens, but instead of snide comments or mean looks, ignore them as much as possible and focus on having a good time with your family