

autism at-a-glance

May 2020

Autism at-a-Glance is a publication of the Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD (CSESA).



Using Public Transportation

Autism at-a-Glance is a series of practitioner and family-friendly documents created by the Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD (CSESA) designed for high school staff members supporting students on the autism spectrum, as well as family members of adolescents with ASD. The purpose of the *Autism at-a-Glance* series is to provide a current summary of topics relevant to adolescents and young adults with ASD as well as practical tips and resources for school and community personnel and family members.

This *Autism at-a-Glance* was designed to support practitioners and family members in promoting independence in daily living skills for adolescents and young adults on the autism spectrum.

Transportation is an important part of daily life because it allows us to move from place to place, such as getting to the grocery store or to a job. For teenagers and young adults on the autism spectrum, travelling to these places can be challenging. This may be due to discomfort going out in crowded public places, such as a subway station, or to not knowing how to navigate from place to place. Driving, riding the bus or train, walking, biking, and flying can bring about anxiety and stress because of the loud noises and crowds, unpredictable schedule changes, late or missed bus or subway, getting lost, or mobility issues. In addition, in many communities public transportation is limited, which creates added difficulty. Because of the stress that transportation options, or lack of transportation options, can create for those with autism, individuals may be limited in the number of times they leave their homes thus preventing them from getting jobs, living independently, or developing and maintaining a social life.

Many individuals with autism delay in obtaining their driver's license and many never drive on their own. Current research reports that only one third of autistic adolescents without an intellectual disability get licensed



Public Transportation

licensed by age 21 (Curry, Yerys, Huang, & Metzger, 2018). So how can those without a driver's license move around their community independently? Strategic use of public transportation that includes extra planning, knowledge of the best times to travel, and assistance from a support network can be the answer.

Types of Public Transportation

This resource focuses on the types of public transportation that may be available in various communities and tips for safe and successful travel.

Bus Systems

Bus systems operate in most cities and towns and many bus companies have online schedules, maps, and route updates. Learn and study the routes so you can take the bus whenever and wherever you want. Smartphone apps such as Google Maps also have real-time route information and directions to destinations that provide bus numbers, travel and estimated arrival times, and alternate routes. Taking the bus is usually affordable too!

Vehicles for Hire

Cars for hire such as taxi cabs, Uber, or Lyft are increasingly available at most locations at any time of the day. Uber and Lyft cars are quite easy to

access and use because all you must do is download the smartphone app and request a car at the touch of your fingertips. The price and estimated time of arrival are displayed before opting to hire the car which is helpful. Many taxi companies are now using smartphone apps as well. Taxi, Uber, and Lyft pricing is competitive, but it ranges in price according to the time of day; prices tend to be lower when it is less busy. A limitation of using these cars may be the technology side of ordering one, so users may need to learn the app ahead of time.

Rail Systems

Subways, light rail, and street cars in larger cities can be a reliable form of transportation. They usually are more limited in their routes and stops than buses. Look into pre-purchasing monthly passes to eliminate the need for buying individual tickets in busy stations.

Paratransit Systems

Paratransit services (vans and small buses) for individuals with disabilities may be available for transportation to doctor's appointments and other essential services. Usually shared-ride services need to be scheduled in advance, but they are wheel-chair accessible and provide door-to-door service. They often require documentation of need for the service.

Amtrak

Amtrak is a railroad service that provides transportation in states across the United States. They have additional services available to passengers with disabilities:



<https://www.amtrak.com/accessible-travel-services>

Call the train station in advance and talk with guest services about accommodations such as advanced boarding times, pre-registering

Air Travel

- **Autism Speaks** and **JetBlue** created a teaching story about flying that a helpful way to prepare for a first flight.

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/Jet%20Blue%20teaching%20story%20final%2009-23-19.pdf>

- **TSA (Transportation Security Administration)** has resources for those with disabilities and medical conditions to make the airport screening process less stressful:

<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/special-procedure>

Tips for Using Public Transportation

Clark just got a job at the computer store about 8 miles from his house. He does not have a driver's license and his parents cannot always drive him to and from work. He knows that his town has a bus system but has never used it and is nervous about finding the correct bus, getting lost and being uncomfortable asking for help, and traveling in a loud and crowded vehicle. Using the following tips Clark can learn how to travel independently to and from work on the local bus.



Tips

- **Create a detailed description of the destination and how to get there.** Lay out every step and stop needed so it can be used as a map. Making a visual map or script with words and pictures that lays out the routes and stops will be helpful. For bus travel, include things like where to wait for the bus, what to do if the bus is late or is missed, how to recognize the correct stop, and what to say if lost.
- **Practice the route with someone** familiar until it is comfortable to do it alone.
- **Create a plan for alternate routes** in case of getting lost or getting off the bus at the wrong stop.
- **Create a visual or script that depicts common behavior on the bus/public transportation.** Consider voice level, staying seated, personal space, stowing items and how to interact with the bus driver or other riders if help is needed.
- **Wear headphones** to block out the noise. Headphones can also signal to others that you would prefer not to chat.
- **Listen to music or read a book** to keep calm and relaxed.
- **Carry a special object that provides comfort, helps reduce sensory overload, or masks unpleasant smells.**
- **Travel at quiet times when it is less crowded.** If the regular bus looks too full, consider waiting for the next one – what adjustments are needed? Plan for this.

Extra Precautions

Take extra precautions during times of widespread illness:

- Follow all current guidance of health experts.
- Wear mask/face covering the nose and mouth for the entire trip.
- Sit or stand as far from others as possible, observing social distancing guidelines of 6 feet apart.
- Clean hands right before and immediately after trip. If thorough hand washing is not possible, use hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch any surfaces and then touch a cell phone and vice versa.
- Avoid public transportation when sick.



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Resources

Accessible Travel Services on AMTRAK

Retrieved from <https://www.amtrak.com/accessible-travel-services>

AFIRM Modules: Scripting, Social Narratives, Task Analysis, & Visual Supports

AFIRM Team. (2018). *Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, FPG Child Development Center, University of North Carolina. Retrieved from afirm.fpg.unc.edu

Autism-Friendly Transport Practices

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Taking an Airplane: A Guide for People with Autism

JetBlue for GOOD and Autism Speaks (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/Jet%20Blue%20teaching%20story%20final%209-23-19.pdf>

Transportation Access Position Statement

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Traveling with Autism

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