



# MIA *air*

AIRPORT INSTRUCTION & READINESS

## Caregiver Information Packet



# Travel Tips for Families with an Individual on the Autism Spectrum



# Introduction:

From airport security to boredom while in flight, plane travel can be daunting for anyone. Individuals with ASD who have difficulty with changes in routine, trouble following directions, and/or are particularly sensitive to sensory stimulation face a greater number of challenges when it comes to airport travel. The following checklist provides important information needed to increase the chances of a successful travel experience.

**It is recommended that you read this packet in its entirety first, a few weeks in advance of your travel date.**

# Travel Checklist

## Making Arrangements:

### Consider the Needs of the Individual with ASD

- Plan travel for a time when the individual will be most relaxed and rested, for example, the morning.
- Plan for least disruption in sleeping and eating routines. Make sure the individual gets a good night's sleep the night before traveling.
- Book direct flights or flights without lengthy layovers, if possible.
- When booking your flight, set preferred seating arrangements based on your individual needs (e.g., sit near front of the plane so exiting the plane is easier).

## Preparing for Travel:

### Inform Others of your Special Needs

- If you require more assistance, call TSA Cares at least 72 hours ahead of travel using the toll free helpline at 1-855-787-2227.
- Print TSA disability disclosure card [http://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/disability\\_notification\\_cards.pdf](http://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/disability_notification_cards.pdf). You may also consider requesting a letter from a doctor describing the individual's disability.
- Consider handing out a wallet card briefly explaining ASD to nearby travelers or plane passengers.

## Take Safety Precautions:

- Make sure the person with ASD has proper identification for travel. By law, adult passengers (18 years and older) are required to show a U.S. federal or state-issued photo ID that

contains the following: name, date of birth, gender, expiration date, and a tamper-resistant feature. ID's can include a driver's license, state ID card or US passport.

- For nonverbal individuals, create an ID card to put in his/her pocket with a current photo, contact information and a list of allergies. You can order ID tags that can be attached to shoelaces or zipper pulls <http://www.zoobearsmedicalid.com>.
- Carry a recent photo of the individual with ASD to show police in case he/she wanders away.
- Order a medical ID bracelet or make sure medical IDs are up to date and on the person, in case of an emergency. Include the word "nonverbal" if applicable.
- Download MIA's free mobile app (MIA Airport Official) to your phone or tablet as this may help you quickly access important information such as flight status, gate, restaurant, and restroom locations. This app is available for download from the iTunes App Store and Google Play.

## Preparing the Individual with ASD to Fly:

- Teach the individual with ASD about the trip as closely as possible and in as many ways as possible, starting a few weeks before the trip.
- Discuss in advance the upcoming trip, the mode of travel, where you are going, who/what you will see, and why the trip is necessary.
- Depending on how familiar or unfamiliar the individual is with airport travel, you may choose to look at pictures, videos, movies, or books about airports and airplanes. If you look up information on the internet, make sure you search for and select websites in advance to screen for appropriate information. For individuals who may need more preparation, you may inquire as to whether airport visits and tours and/or mock flights are available.

- Print and read MIAair’s Social Narrative before going (see Additional Resources for additional suggestions).
- Be aware of, and work to avoid, known triggers that may result in increased frustration, overload, anxiety, or maladaptive behaviors (e.g., long waits, separation from preferred toys or items at security checkpoint, loud noises). Make a list and think about ways to address the individual’s specific sensory and behavioral needs. For example, if loud noises typically trigger a meltdown, purchase noise cancelling headphones or earplugs and bring them with you on travel day.
- Simulate the airport experience as closely as possible, in as many ways as possible. If you have never traveled by plane, have a practice run with the individual to determine how much time your family will need.

## **Packing Carry-On Luggage:**

### **General Tips**

- Pack in advance to reduce personal stress.
  - Create a list before beginning to pack; one for each member of the family.
  - Be sure electronics are fully charged and take with you any chargers.
- Make sure you carry identification, medical ID, emergency contact information, and disability notification on your person.
- Pack travel documents, including tickets, emergency contact list, passports when necessary, luggage identification/claim tags, original bottles of all prescription medications, doctor’s letter listing allergies or other special needs.
- Put luggage tags on all suitcases with names, phone numbers and addresses.
- Bring medication and first aid items.

- Pack all liquids in 3.4 ounce containers and place in a clear quart-size zip lock bag (only allowed one bag per traveler).

## Comfort and Entertainment:

- Let the individual with ASD pack a rolling carry-on luggage that will contain personal items that will keep him/her entertained. Include in the luggage any snacks that will pass through security. For example:
  - Pack toys, books, music, and electronics (e.g., iPad) and recharge cords. Label all electronics with name and contact information. Bring extra batteries!
  - Bring headphones for the individuals to enjoy video games, movies or music and not disturb other passengers.
  - Include a familiar or soothing item (e.g., favorite stuffed animal, favorite book, Lego figures) to reduce anxiety and increase feeling of security.
  - Pack favorite foods and snacks. Bring more than you need in case there is a delay. Gum or hard candy may help the individual cope with pressure changes.
  - Bring a sweater, jacket or blanket as it may get cold on the plane when in the air.
  - Take a change of clothes and pair of socks for spills or soils.
- You may consider purchasing some new inexpensive toys or books to play with during the journey. Something new is more likely to capture and keep the individual's attention for longer. Depending on the individual's age and/or attention span, you may choose to introduce a new item every hour or so to reduce boredom.
- If the individual uses an alternative and augmentative communication device (AAC) or system (e.g., PECS), make sure to take it with you.

## Travel Day:

### Before Leaving for the Airport

- Check in for your flight at home.
- Check flight status before leaving to the airport; also check traffic reports for route to the airport.
- Some airports will not require the individual with ASD to take off their shoes when going through security. However, you may want to have the individual wear easily removable shoes in case this is not possible.
- Go to the airport with plenty of time. Try not to rush as this may increase anxiety for parents and the individual with ASD. If you know the individual has his/her routine, be sure to include it in the time allocated at the airport.
  - For example: Allow time if you know the individual likes to stare at the escalators.

### At the Airport:

- If elopement is a concern, be sure to keep your family together. The airport is full of people running from terminal to terminal; they may accidentally bump into you.
- Once you are ready to go through security, present the disability disclosure card and ask to go through handicap or first class check in. This may help the waiting process.
- When you get to the scanner, refer to social narrative to remind the individual of the security process.
  - Let him/her place his/her things in the bins.
  - If elopement is a concern, let security know the individual will go through the scanner, but they may need to hold him/her while a caregiver passes through next.
  - Let the individual take his/her things from the x-ray line.

- Be sure to allow non-rushed time to put on shoes, belts, jackets, and time for the individual to review what he/she brought.
- Set aside regularly occurring breaks.
- Know the individual's triggers and plan accordingly.
- Once at the gate, present the disability disclosure card to the agent to let the agent know that the individual has ASD so they can advise the crew. If you haven't already done so, request preferred seating and/or boarding with the agent at the gate.
- Find an empty gate with no other passengers to relax and wait.
- Arrive at the departure gate early and make a request for pre-boarding.
- Important: Remember to praise and encourage appropriate behavior for the individual with ASD (e.g., "You're doing such a nice job sitting and waiting for me to finish putting on my shoes"). You may also consider using a formal system (e.g., sticker chart) that reinforces the individual for exhibiting desired behaviors. For ideas, watch UM-NSU CARD's online webinar on "Creating and Implementing Token Economies" <http://umnsucard.adobeconnect.com/p4fwtmn7se0/>

## On the Plane:

- Try to determine where your the individual would like to sit before getting the family situated.
- If necessary, and based on the individual with ASD, you may choose to disclose to the passengers around you that you are traveling with an individual with ASD. For example:
  - Let people know the individual might close the shades all around him/her.
  - They may see or hear flapping, rocking or vocal sounds.

- Once in flight, the individual may pace.
- The individual may kick the seat in front of him/her.
- Know your family. Most people want to jump up as soon as the plane stops and get off the plane; others prefer to sit and wait for everyone to leave in order to calmly get the family and luggage together.

## **Exiting the Plane/Leaving the Airport:**

- At baggage claim, keep your family at a safe distance from the carousel to avoid injury. If traveling with another adult, have the adult walk the individual with ASD to find a seat and wait for the luggage.
- If the individual elopes, you may need to hold his/her hands in the parking lot.

# **Additional Resources**

## **TSA:**

### **TSA Cares Help Line**

TSA Cares is a help line to assist travelers with disabilities and medical conditions.

- Please call 1-855-787-2227 at least 72 hours ahead of travel for information about what to expect during screening.
- Discuss your screening needs and concerns with a representative.
- That information is then forwarded to your airport.
- A Passenger Support Specialist (PSS) is assigned, who will contact you by phone to discuss a meeting time and checkpoint, as well as assistance with the screening.

\* Note: TSA Cares is only for assistance with screening, not for assistance through the airport. The airline itself can provide assistance. There are no exemptions from screening. This process allows the TSA to better understand the individual needs of the customers and the best way to conduct the screening.

## **MyTSA:**

The “MyTSA” mobile application provides travelers with 24/7 access to the most commonly requested TSA information on their mobile device. No matter where you are, you’ll have easy access to information you need to get through security and onto the plane safely and smoothly. Download the “MyTSA” app on iTunes and Google Play.

## **TSA’s Travel Checklist:**

There is an easy to follow checklist that helps you prepare for travel through security prior to arrival at the airport. To download TSA’s Travel Checklist visit: <http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/summer-travel>

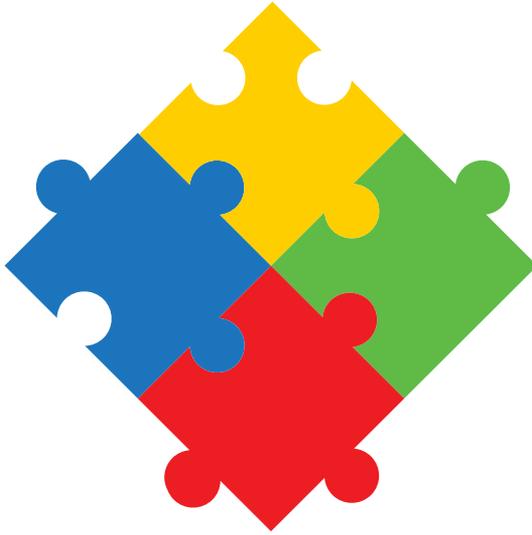
## **CARD:**

CARD stands for the Center for Autism & Related Disabilities. Our center, based at the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University, is one of seven state-funded, university-based outreach and support centers in Florida dedicated to optimizing the potential of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), dual sensory impairments, sensory impairments with other disabling conditions, and related disabilities. Visit [www.umcard.org](http://www.umcard.org) for more information about UM-NSU CARD and the types of services we provide.

## **CARD VINE:**

CARD VINE (Virtual Interactive Network for Education) provides brief video tutorials on a variety of topics related to autism spectrum disorder and related disabilities.

The CARD VINE Webinar Library compiles all of our recorded bi-monthly webinars for your viewing purposes. The webinars are useful and informative and can be watched whenever it is convenient for you. To view the ever-growing collection of CARD VINE webinars visit: <http://www.nova.edu/card/webinars.html>



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