VACATION, SPORT & LEISURE NAVIGATION PACK

A guide to holiday ideas and sport and leisure opportunities for children and adults with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Compiled by the Autism Information Line
Autism Spectrum Australia
Who is Autism Spectrum Australia?
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is the largest service provider for individuals with autism spectrum disorder\(^1\) (ASD) and their families in Australia.

What is the Autism Information Line?
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) recognises that there are many questions for individuals who have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as for their families, carers, support staff and professionals. It is with the support of fundraising that Aspect operates the Autism Information Line (AIL).

The role of the AIL is to:
- Assist in answering specific enquiries
- Provide a referral point for services within Aspect and the wider community
- Offer brief practical advice to assist families and carers with their day to day management of children with ASD

The information line is staffed by Aspect professionals from a range of disciplines, who access a wide range of information regarding services and resources. Interpreters can be arranged for callers (please advise language required on initial call).

Please call the Autism Information Line

02 8977 8377
1800 069 978

Email: infoline@aspect.org.au

This pack is part of a series of Navigation Packs produced by the Autism Information Line. Other subjects are Social Skills, Siblings, Behaviour, School aged Services, Multicultural Services, Post school Options and Finance.

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\(^1\) ASD includes autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disability – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger’s disorder.
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- Holiday ideas and camps
- Respite and Vacation Care
- Sport and Leisure
- A guide to ASD for sports and activity leaders

Every care is taken to ensure that the information included in this Navigation Pack is correct but inaccuracies may nevertheless occur. If you discover any information which you believe to be inaccurate please contact Infoline@autismspectrum.org.au.

Services are included in the Navigation Pack to assist you. Their inclusion in the pack does not necessarily imply that ASPECT endorses or supports them, nor does the absence of a service imply that ASPECT does not support them. Aspect cannot be held responsible for any damage or loss caused by any inaccuracy in the Navigation Pack.
Introduction

Vacations can be busy and sometimes stressful for all of us but more so for a family with a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Holidays can take a child out of routine and put them into situations with unfamiliar places and people. To help reduce these stresses it is important to PREPARE, PLAN and PREPARE some more!

- **PLAN** your destination. Find out specifics about where you are staying such as noise level, where activities are held or if you will be visiting restaurants. You may even be able to draw a map of your hotel or house.

- **PREPARE** a holiday timetable or booklet. If you know where you are going you can download pictures (google/images and destinations) and PLAN events and activities. These visual supports will help your child to understand where they are going and what it will be like when they are there. If you are planning to go by plane, PREPARE your child for the airport. Social stories showing your child the process of checking in and boarding will help reduce anxiety. Make sure you build in the possibility of delays!

- **Use social stories to PREPARE** your child for the holiday. There are some good ideas for writing your own social stories on websites such as [www.usevisualstrategies.com](http://www.usevisualstrategies.com), [www.sandboxlearning.com.au](http://www.sandboxlearning.com.au), [www.stickids.com.au](http://www.stickids.com.au)

- **PLAN** to maintain as many of your normal routines as you can. This might be keeping to morning and bedtime rituals or making sure your child’s comfort toy is readily available.

- **PREPARE** for boredom on long flights or car journeys. Familiar items can help your child stay calm.

- **PREPARE** for some behavioural changes. For some children with ASD new ways of expressing anxiety or boredom may emerge due to changes in routine and/or environment. Sensory issues may be more noticeable.

- **PLAN** some calming activities during the day to allow some downtime for your child.

    *And then enjoy the holiday with your family!!*
Holiday ideas

When choosing a holiday destination, find out what facilities are provided and whether the staff can understand disabilities in general, or ideally, ASD. Consider the specific needs of your child. For example, if your child is particularly sensitive to noise, ask how close your hotel room will be to the pool area, bar or restaurant. Groups of people may gather there all day and therefore some noise will be inevitable.

- National Disability Services (NDS) has a comprehensive guide to accommodation and travel. [www.nds.org.au](http://www.nds.org.au)
- IDEAS, a NSW disability information service has an online travel directory, including information on Camps and specialist travel operators. Phone 1800 029 904 or visit [www.ideas.org.au/travel/](http://www.ideas.org.au/travel/)
- Accessible accommodation database where you can search for options within each state. [www.e-bility.com/accesstravel](http://www.e-bility.com/accesstravel)
- Careaway Tours provide holidays and tours with 24 hour staff support to various destinations in Australia and New Zealand. For further information phone 02 4872 2224 [www.careaway.com.au](http://www.careaway.com.au)
- Lyndwood tours specialises in providing medically supported holiday opportunities for people with a disability. For details call 0407 463 756 or visit [www.lyndwoodtours.com.au](http://www.lyndwoodtours.com.au)
- Sunshine Holidays offer holidays and respite for people with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury or mental health difficulties. Individual and group holidays offered in Australia and overseas. For details contact 1800 786 744 [www.sunshineholidays.org](http://www.sunshineholidays.org)
- Disability Trust’s respite homes at Sanctuary Point, Shoalhaven and Bargo, Southern Highlands available for individual respite and also family holidays. For further information availability and bookings call 02 4255 8000.
- Kid Friendly website has information on places of interest that are child friendly. Information on school holiday activities is available. [www.kidfriendly.com.au](http://www.kidfriendly.com.au)
- Qantas Carer Concession Card is issued to people with a disability who have high level support needs and require the full-time assistance of a carer whilst on a plane. The card entitles cardholders and their nominated carer to a discount on the full fare for Qantas domestic travel within Australia and New Zealand. NICAN administers this on behalf of Qantas, phone 1800 806 769 or visit [www.nican.com.au](http://www.nican.com.au)
The following camps offer holidays to children and young adults with a disability. Each camp has a different eligibility criteria and specific age groups for which it caters.

- Anglican Youthsworks Holiday Camps at Springwood in the Blue Mountains. Phone 02 8268 3346 or visit [www.youthworks.net](http://www.youthworks.net)
- Camp David (adults) and Camp Johnathan (8-18 years) Blue Mountains. Phone 02 4776 1397 or 02 4396 4336.
- Camp Breakaway (Central Coast) Phone 02 4390 7624 or visit [www.breakaway.org.au](http://www.breakaway.org.au)
- Camp Toukley (Central Coast, Hawkesbury Valley and Blue Mountains) Phone 02 4396 6194 or visit [www.camptoukley.com.au](http://www.camptoukley.com.au)
- Camp Kedron (Northern Beaches Sydney) is a non-denominational Christian camp, available for hire by church groups, school and other approved organizations. Phone 02 9450 1296 [www.collaroycentre.org.au](http://www.collaroycentre.org.au)
- Marist Children’s Holiday Camp. Phone 9816 0808 or visit [www.joeyes.org](http://www.joeyes.org)
- Abbox of Fun Children's Holiday camp. Email abbox@abbotsleigh.nsw.edu.au
- Ignatian Children's Holiday Camp, Riverview. Phone 02 9882 8222
- The Sony Foundation sponsors a number of camps across Australia throughout the year. Visit [www.sonyfoundation.org.au](http://www.sonyfoundation.org.au)
- CBM Australia- Christian Camping Program for children and adults. Various camps run throughout the year. For details call 1800 678 069.
Respite and Vacation Care

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre Program provide a single point of contact for the general public, service providers, general practitioners and other health professionals for information on community, aged and disability services and carer support. The Centres can also assist with information about costs for services, assessment processes and eligibility criteria. They also co-ordinate access to respite services in your local area. Phone 1800 052 222 www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

RIAP Intake Line (ADHC) is a centralised intake and allocation point for carers wishing to access ADHC funded flexible respite services. Not established in all regions of NSW. Meetings are held during March and April to allocate for the coming year. Contact your local ADHC team for details.

Recreation Team (ADHC) provides skill building recreational activities and outings for school age children during the school holidays, and after school. Contact your local ADHC team for details.

Home Care Service of NSW provides personal care and respite services in your home, personal care is free for children under 16. Contact local ADHC office.

Holiday Programs in most areas the local council or the YMCA is involved in the organisation of holiday programs for school-aged children. These programs often include children with a disability and offer additional support. Contact your local Council or YMCA www.ymcasydney.org/activity/holiday-adventures

Teen Time offers after school and vacation support for working parents with a planned program of social, recreational and developmental activities based on individual needs. Contact your local ADHC office for details.
**Sport and leisure**

Taking part in a sport or joining a group like the Scouts, are popular activities for children and young people. Children with disabilities are encouraged to join in such activities to help improve their health and give them opportunities to make friends. Many mainstream community groups actively welcome people with an ASD, and many others are willing to. They also have the option of participating in a number of specialist activities.

**NICAN** provides an Australia wide information service relating to sport, recreation, tourism and the arts to people with a disability. Phone 1800 806 769 or visit [www.nican.com.au](http://www.nican.com.au)

**Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)** has an online guide to recreation and travel. [www.pdcnsw.org.au](http://www.pdcnsw.org.au)

**Wheelchair sports NSW** conducts a wide range of wheelchair sporting events. Phone 9809 5260 [www.wsnsw.org.au](http://www.wsnsw.org.au)

**NSW Sport and Recreation** is a state government organisation offering several different programs for people with disabilities, including Sports Ability 4 All, respite camps, Disability Sport a Month and the Swimsafe Program. For details call 131 302 or 131 450 (Interpreting Service) or visit [www.dsr.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au)

**Down Syndrome NSW** has a comprehensive listing of special needs community activities and services, including a wide range of sports and recreation classes [www.dsansw.org.au](http://www.dsansw.org.au)

**Accessible Arts (Arts and Disability NSW)** has a What’s on listing where you can find details of local courses and groups. [www.aarts.net.au](http://www.aarts.net.au) or call 02 9251 6499.

**Special Olympics Australia** provides year-round sports training and competition for children and adults with an intellectual disability. The sports available include aquatics, athletics, basketball, bocce, golf, gymnastics, soccer, softball, tennis, dance and ten pin bowling. For details phone 02 8116 9833 or visit [www.specialolympics.com.au](http://www.specialolympics.com.au) Individual regions may also have their own websites, for example [www.souppernorthshore.com](http://www.souppernorthshore.com) on the North Shore.

**Soccer - the Football4all programs** are club based football programs approved by Football NSW and specially designed to offer modified soccer football and participation in a safer and less competitive environment with a focus on playing, physical activities and making friends in a fun, safe and family friendly environment. Programs throughout Sydney including; Bankstown, Eastern Suburbs, Kellyville, St Ives, Baulkham Hills, Nepean, West Pennant Hills, West Pymble, Kings Langley. Details on the website, follow link from resources to special needs football [www.footballnsw.com.au](http://www.footballnsw.com.au)

**Cricket NSW** hold development days for people with a disability that focus on fun, social interaction and skill development at all levels. For details call 02 8302 6033 or visit [www.cricketnsw.com/disabled-cricket](http://www.cricketnsw.com/disabled-cricket) or email info@cricketnsw.com.au

**The Rainbow Club** provides swimming tuition to children with disabilities. There are currently 15 clubs across NSW. Phone 0418 963 087 or visit [www.rainbowclubaust.com.au](http://www.rainbowclubaust.com.au)
**Scouts Australia** offers additional support for young people with disabilities to be integrated into mainstream scout groups. There are also three Special Needs Groups where the support ratio is one adult to three youth members. These are located at 1st Cromehurst at Lindfield, Cooks Hill City in Newcastle and Bangor Kangaroos in Bangor. For information on groups throughout NSW phone 02 9735 9000 or visit www.nsw.scouts.com.au

**Girl Guides NSW and ACT** Guide Units welcome girls with disabilities, depending on the Leader's capability and the nature of the disability. Their Special Needs Consultant will work with you to find the best opportunities for your daughter. For information about Guiding in your area contact Guide House on 02 8396 5200 or visit www.guidesnsw.org.au

**Riding for the Disabled (RDA)** provides people with a disability the opportunity to ride and enjoy all of the activities connected with horse riding. It is a volunteer based not-for-profit organisation. Phone 02 8116 9726 or visit www.rdansw.org.au

**Tennis** The Australian Tennis Foundation (ATF) aims to broaden the opportunities to play tennis for all groups in the community. For more information phone 03 9914 4000 or email at atf@tennis.com.au

**Disabled Wintersport Australia** provides opportunities for people with disabilities, including ASD, to enjoy winter sports including skiing. Members of DWA receive concessions on lift passes and private lessons at all ski resorts in Australia. Phone 02 6495 4334 or visit www.disabledwintersport.com.au

**Disabled Surfers Association of Australia Inc (DSA)** is a volunteer based organisation that helps people with all types of disability to access beaches and the surf. There are DSA branches across NSW. Visit www.surfershelpingsurfers.com

**Sailability Australia** aims to encourage and facilitate sailing and boating throughout Australia for people with a disability in social, recreational and competitive activities. Phone 02 8424 7408 or visit www.sailability.org.au/australia

**Sailors with disabilities** seeks to encourage people of all abilities to enjoy sailing. Phone 02 8079 5997 or visit www.sailorswithdisabilities.com

**Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA)** Association of professionals in music therapy (the use of music to address particular needs, including those of children and adults with a disability). The website has a national register of qualified music therapists www.austmta.org.au
Activity leaders and sports instructors: a guide to autism

If you are a sports instructor or leader of an organised activity group, such as the Scouts or Guides, you may be asked to include a child with autism in your class or group. Here is short guide to help you meet their needs.

What is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

Autism is a lifelong disability that affects the way a person communicates with and relates to people around them. Children with autism have difficulty relating to others in a meaningful way. Their ability to develop friendships is generally limited, as is their capacity to understand other people's emotional expressions. All children with autism have difficulties in three main areas: social interaction, social communication and social imagination. This is known as the triad of impairments. Children with autism often have high anxiety levels, have a resistance to change and/or have obsessions with particular objects or topics of special interest to them, such as dinosaurs or trains. Some children with autism may also have accompanying learning disabilities.

Autism affects different people in different ways and to different extents, so the difficulties and behaviour you see in one child may be very different to that which you see in another. This is why autism is known as a spectrum condition. You will often see it referred to as autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Some children may be diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome (AS) or high-functioning autism. Children with AS have fewer problems with language than those with autism. They often speak fluently, though their words can sometimes sound formal or stilted. Children with AS do not usually have the accompanying learning disabilities associated with autism; in fact, they are often of average or above average intelligence. Many children with AS or high-functioning autism will enter mainstream school and, with the right support and encouragement, make good progress and go on to further education and employment.

Children with autism may be hypersensitive (over-sensitive) or hyposensitive (under-sensitive) to sensory situations, such as light or sound. For example, a child may feel physical pain at the slightest touch or may break a bone without giving any indication that they are in pain. Likewise, they can find sound intolerable and may have to wear ear defenders to block out the noise which they find physically painful. They may display self-stimulatory behaviours such as hand-flapping or spinning, which make them feel they are in control of a painful environment.

It may also be very difficult for a child with autism to listen to you in a noisy environment, simply because they cannot filter out background sound. If at all possible, provide a quiet room or space where they can go to calm down. Difficulty with balance may make activities involving balance such as sporting activities very challenging for a child with autism. On the other hand, they may seek out stimulation by rocking or spinning. Dyspraxia (clumsiness) is also a common condition amongst people with an autism spectrum disorder. Like all children, each child with autism is different from the next, so the descriptions given here should only be taken as a general guide. Nevertheless, the problems affecting social interaction, communication and imagination, along with repetitive behaviour, are common to all. For brevity, we use the word autism in this information sheet to refer to all children on the autism spectrum, including those with Asperger syndrome. You may not need to use all the strategies detailed below but you may find some of them useful.
Joining a new group

When a child with autism is faced with a new situation, he or she may become highly anxious. Careful planning before they start a new club or activity will therefore be invaluable in helping to reduce their anxiety levels. This can be done in a number of ways. If at all possible, invite the child to visit the building in which the event takes place when there are no children about. This will enable the child to become familiar with the new surroundings without the distraction of noisy children. This visit can be followed up by further visits while the other children are there; gradually increasing the length of time the child stays. At first the parents may wish to stay with their child, and this should be allowed, even if it is not standard practice.

Use a book of photos to familiarise the child with the location and activity, showing pictures of the building with and without children, the group leaders or instructors, the various activities that take place, the journey to and from the group, and so on. This may need to be shown to the child multiple times until they become accustomed to their new activities.

Explaining the rules

Children with autism are usually happy in a structured environment and are often adept at learning the rules and observing them. However, children with autism often have no sense of danger, and cannot always foresee the consequences of their actions. It is therefore important that you communicate safety rules clearly and in a way that the child understands. It is a good idea to give parents a written list of rules before the child goes to the club so that they can go through the rules themselves with the child. Also, make sure you go through the rules with the child before the start of any particular activity. It may be necessary to do this on multiple occasions before the child fully understands them.

Visual communication

Children with autism are typically visual learners so it is a good idea to have written or visual instructions attached to the wall or given to the child so that they understand the rules of a group or activity. Information may need to be broken down into small chunks in order to understand them. It often helps to provide a child with autism with a visual timetable of what is going to happen next. For example, if you are teaching a child to swim, the timetable could include pictures of the child arriving at the swimming pool, getting changed, having a swimming lesson, free play, getting showered, getting dressed and going home. A laminated copy of the timetable can be placed alongside the pool, within easy reach of the child.

Giving spoken instructions

Children with autism may find it difficult to follow instructions given to the group as a whole. For example, they might not understand that "Time to go in" applies to them, so you may need to give the instruction individually. Always say the child's name first - "Johnny, it's time to go in" - to catch their attention and let them know that you are speaking to them. Use a calm voice and do not shout. Speak slowly and clearly and, if you do not get an immediate response, be patient - processing instructions can take longer for a child with autism than a typically developing child. Children with autism may also find it difficult to process too much verbal information at once, so try and break up your instructions and, wherever possible, back them up with pictures or written cues.
Children with autism tend to take things literally. Telling them to pull up their socks may well result in them literally pulling up their socks; they are not making fun of you, they are simply following the instruction you gave them. Try to avoid using idioms and metaphors and always state exactly what you mean.

**Explaining autism to other children**

One question that may arise is whether or not the other children should be told that one of the people in the group has autism. There are pros and cons to doing this and the decision ultimately rests with the child's parents. Some children, sadly, may bully the child if they know he or she has autism, but they may do this in any case if they perceive the child as being different. Other children will do the opposite and want to befriend the child with autism.

If you decide to tell the other children, it is important to explain the differences caused by autism in a way they will understand. They must understand, for example, why the child with autism is not told off for doing something that they themselves would be told off for. A frequently-used strategy for managing the child's relationship with the rest of the group is to create a 'Circle of Friends'. Please contact the infoline for more details about this. We can also provide a list of books that explain autism to children and young people.

Another advantage of making the child's autism known to the rest of the group is that you can then use peer modelling, in which another child shows the child with autism how to do a particular task. This will support the child in their understanding - when teaching or showing a child with autism a new task, it should be broken down into small steps or stages, allowing the child plenty of time to learn each step.

**Siblings**

If the child has a sibling in the same group, try not to depend on them to look after their brother or sister, as they need to be able to enjoy the activities without taking on caring responsibilities. This doesn't mean that you can't ask their advice if you are experiencing difficulties with the child with autism.

**Trips and camps**

In many cases, there is no reason why children with autism cannot go on trips with the group, or away to camp, although it is essential that the trip is carefully planned. Some children may need one-to-one support, either from an adult or a child buddy. If possible, show the child some photos or a brochure of where he or she will be going. If they are going camping, it will be a good idea for them to spend a night in the tent in their back garden beforehand so that they get used to the idea.

Arrange a meeting with the child's parents and discuss how best to support them on the trip. Include the child in the meeting so that they know what the plans are for the trip and that the group leader will be acting as their parent during the time they are away.

*Based on an article by the National Autistic Society UK [www.nas.org.uk]*