Preparing for the Holidays: Vacations and Travel

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Many families travel over Winter Break. As Dr. Cathy Pratt shared on IRCA’s Facebook Page last week, it is important to prepare for the changes that occur, due to travel and vacation.

Remember to pack visual supports and to communicate what activities are going to take place each day. It is helpful for individuals to understand what is expected and what is going to happen next.

It is also important to prepare for delays or changes in schedule and to consider anxiety and other sensory needs. For specific sensory strategies visit the IRCA Sensory Page.

One strategy that may be helpful is to pack a “Wait” visual that is familiar to the individual and a “Wait” calming bag. This could be a simple makeup bag or pencil pouch with activities that calm. You could include a portable game or video device or an iPod with headphones, gum, putty, and other fidgets. A small plastic photo album with favorite characters and pictures can provide calming input for individuals who would enjoy flipping through and visualizing things that make them feel happy. You may choose to include paper and crayons if the individual likes to color or draw and some favorite snacks. In addition to the “Wait” calming bag, you may wish to bring weighted blankets or vests, if those are used regularly, or a familiar item to hold.

Use of a social narrative in addition to a vacation schedule can help you to avoid or reduce meltdowns and anxiety brought about by changes in routine.

The attached narrative “I am Going on Vacation” is an example of a social narrative. It is also available on our Visual Supports page. You may choose to use photos from a previous vacation if you are returning to a familiar place or to use photos from the destination website to create a customized narrative. Those photos and destination information can also be helpful when creating a visual schedule for each day.

Happy Holidays & Safe Travels