


Introduction

elcome to *Top Ten Tips: A Survival Guide for Families with Children on the Autism Spectrum*. This book is meant to be a quick and helpful tool for navigating your way through everyday activities and occurrences when you live with a child with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Several things make this book unique.

1. The book is organized so that you don't have to read through any theories or lengthy descriptions – it is all practical; short and sweet. The stuff you want to know NOW!
2. The book consists of tips contributed by some of the top autism specialists in the world. You get information from the very best – and it is all here in one place.
3. Families who are living with autism every day, just like you, have also contributed tips and suggestions. Many families had to learn these tips the hard way, through trial and error. We are fortunate that they have done the groundwork and that I can share their successes here with you.
4. Throughout the book, you will notice that certain strategies or concepts are marked with an asterisk (*). These are explained in greater detail in the Appendix so they are easier to use.

**How to Get the Most out of This Book ...
Where You Need It When You Need It**

The book is organized so that you can flip to a specific activity or event literally at a moment's notice. For example, if you are looking for tips on haircuts – there are 10 great tips waiting for you. If your child is about to have a birthday party and you are dreading it – there are 10 tips right here to help you out! ... And on and on.


Of course, lists of tips are not exhaustive, nor would it be realistic to expect instant solutions to all your everyday challenges. I am sure that you will find some tips that work for you now while others will be better at a later date. Ultimately, some may never be a good fit for your child or family. That's okay. There is still plenty to choose from. The tips are intended to serve as a guide. Some tips may even inspire some creativity on your part. The point is, you don't have to forge the path on your own. You have a survival guide to get you going in the right direction.

A final note, the tips within each topic are not listed in any particular order. Just scan them and start with the one that seems the most promising to you and your family.

Good luck!

CHAPTER 1

I Can Do It All by Myself!

ometimes the most difficult routines for children with autism spectrum disorders are the ones that occur the most frequently, which is all the more reason to get a handle on them.

This chapter provides tips to help with the day-to-day tasks and activities that take place in your home.

CHAPTER 2

Travel Time

Traveling together as a family should be a part of every child's life. It is not always easy to travel with a child who has an autism spectrum disorder, because the disruption in routine can be significant and upset him and everybody else around him. This chapter provides tips and ideas that not only make family travel possible but fun, too!

Travel Time

4 While on an airplane, bringing along video games like a Nintendo or a portable Playstation can save your life.

Holly Reycraft

5 For children who use visual forms of communication, create a choice board* for use with the flight attendant so your child can interact and request his choice of drink and/or snack.

Mindy Small

6 Bathrooms are loud and bouncy on airplanes. Go to the bathroom with your child and wait to flush until he has left. Also, make sure you go to the bathroom on the plane right before descent. The flight attendants are serious when they say that everyone must remain in their seats at the end of the flight.

Cindy O'Dell

7 For higher functioning children, write a list of 20 items that you see in the airline sales magazine (e.g., map of destination airport in the back, ad for a certain restaurant). Challenge the child to find them as fast as she can.

Joanna Keating-Velasco

8 Borrow or bring a DVD player (charged up!!) and allow the child to watch one movie on the plane. Be prepared for the battery to die. Have a backup plan.

Joanna Keating-Velasco

9 Bring Colorforms™ or other vinyl stickers. They stick to the windows and can provide lots of quiet entertainment on a long flight.

Teresa Cardon

10 Have your child decorate his suitcase before the trip. Watching for his unique decorations gives him something to look forward to while waiting for the luggage to come off the plane. It also acts as the reward for waiting when he sees his special bag coming.

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Travel Time

Go online to www.mouseplanet.com and research what months and days at Disneyland have the fewest guests. Then arrive at the parking lot 45 minutes prior to the gates opening. This way you can be at the front gate and get into Main Street just in time for the park to open. Use the restroom. Then get a Fast Pass for one of the big rides to use later. Enjoy a relatively calm morning. Seek out great rides with no lines. Visit characters.

Joanna Keating-Velasco

Consider getting a stroller. Even if your child is older, he may appreciate the stroller after a while. If nothing else, the stroller is a great place to put your stuff.

Michele Walker

If you have more than one child, you can utilize CHILD SWAP. One adult must wait in line with one child. When you get to an employee, ask for a CHILD SWAP pass. This means that an adult not waiting in line can walk around with the child who has trouble waiting. When the first child and adult finish the ride, they transfer the CHILD SWAP pass to the adult and child who were walking around, who can now go right through with no wait.

Joanna Keating-Velasco

If it's the child's birthday, go immediately to City Hall and notify them. The child will get to hear a special Disney character on the town hall phone. The child also gets a special sticker and is recognized by name all day long.

Joanna Keating-Velasco

CHAPTER 3

Friendship Factors

Play and social interactions are important elements of childhood. Children on the spectrum often need supports to make play and other social interactions successful and enjoyable. The tips in this chapter can help turn play dates and social interactions into positive experiences for all.

Be clear with relatives/neighbors/schools about what events or activities you will and will not be able to attend or participate in. Be willing to say no if a given activity is not in your child's best interest. When appropriate, ask relatives and friends to schedule events further apart to allow your child to wind down in between. The earlier you address this with people, especially family members, the more willing they are to help accommodate your needs.

Kathryn Jolley

Go to your family prepared with facts. They may have heard a couple of things about autism in the media or they may have a very limited frame of reference. Your job is to educate them so that they can be a part of the solution and not add to any panic or confusion.

Teresa Cardon

Give your relatives something to do. Relatives often feel a sense of loss and helplessness when learning that a family member has been diagnosed. A book and other resources that give them practical strategies that they can understand and implement right away will help empower them. See the Appendix for ideas.

Teresa Cardon

You know your family best. If it would work better to tell them all in a large group, then plan a gathering. If you think that a few private lunches or get-togethers would be more effective, take that route. There is no perfect answer, and you need to feel comfortable in the setting you choose.

Teresa Cardon

Your family may not know how to react to the word *autism*. They may experience a lot of negative or sad emotions and confusion. Some people go through a grieving process upon learning about the diagnosis. Denial is a common emotion. You can only provide the information and facts about autism. You cannot force anyone to accept it.

Teresa Cardon

Let your family know how much you need them. Now is the time to ask for help. Let them help you.

Teresa Cardon

School Days

Create a one-page visual support using pictures or words that remind your child of what activities he can do on the bus and what he cannot do. Laminate it and be sure to send it with him every day or, if possible, arrange to leave it with the bus driver if the same driver takes the child every day.

Teresa Cardon

Many children like maps and directions. Create a map of the route to school and add boxes along the way or landmarks that your child can check off during the ride. This is a good sequencing skill to practice; besides, it helps pass the time.

Teresa Cardon

Create a strategy to help your child make good choices when she is on the bus (or in class, on the playground, etc.), particularly when there isn't anyone else around to ask. Teach the child to think about three questions before doing something:

1. Is this something I would want to do?
2. Will I get in trouble for doing it?
3. Does this make sense?

Create a Power Card* that the child can take with her on the bus to remind her of the strategy.

Lisa Lieberman

Get to know your child's bus driver. He or she is with your child for a significant length of time each school day and can be an important member of your child's team. Be sure to share specific information about you child – calming activities, what may cause anxiety, favorite things, etc.


Teresa Cardon

Create a way for your child to monitor his behavior on the bus ride. A visual support that reminds him of the "rules" is a good start. Underneath the rules, add boxes where the child can put a check mark or smiley face. Make up rules for when the child gets to add a check mark, like every time the bus comes to a stop, or give him a watch to keep track of the time intervals.

Teresa Cardon

CHAPTER 8

Holidaze!

olidays and special events can be an overwhelming time for everyone, but they are integral parts of establishing family traditions, so don't just avoid them because you know they will be challenging. Prepare your child so that she can manage the changes in routine that are inevitable and, ultimately, learn to enjoy and look forward to holidays and special events.

CHAPTER 9

All the Rest ...

This chapter covers important topics that should not be overlooked. Many of the tips included here can be effective supports for the topics discussed in previous chapters. So think about integrating the ideas you read here in a variety of situations and locations.