

TRAVEL TOOLKIT



For caregivers traveling with neurodiverse children



DISTRACTION TOOLKITS

How can Distraction Toolkits help?

Traveling can be a lot of fun, but also filled with challenges! Aside from navigating the inherent stress that comes from "getting from here to there," neurodiverse children and autistic individuals may experience additional anxiety from being in a new setting. Unstructured time, often a part of traveling, can be challenging for those with neurodiversities, as well. A Distraction Toolkit helps travelers with neurodiversities remain calm and cope with delays, boredom, or unstructured time.

Who benefits?

Anyone can benefit from a Distraction Toolkit. In fact, most people who travel will bring along some items to help them stay busy and cope with delays. Distraction Toolkits, which contain carefully selected materials to meet individual needs, can be particularly helpful for autistic individuals and those with sensory or attentional difficulties.

A Distraction Toolkit helps travelers with neurodiversities have a positive travel experience, remain calm, and cope with delays, boredom, unwanted surprises, or unstructured time that often comes when traveling.

A Distraction Toolkit is tailored to meet the unique needs of the individual and the settings and experiences encountered while traveling.

Tips to Create an Effective Distraction Toolkit

An effective Distraction Toolkit is tailored to the unique needs of the individual. Some individuals enjoy more sensory input and others may have reactions to certain sensory experiences. For those who seek sensory input (e.g., enjoy touching, smelling, or looking at toys and other objects), toolkit items should help to satisfy in this way. For those who experience sensory sensitivities, toolkit materials should help avoid or limit certain types of sensory input. Some individuals may show sensory needs across both areas. It may be helpful to seek advice from an occupational therapist for additional ideas.



To create a Distraction Toolkit, consider including items connected to each of the five senses. Some ideas are:

SIGHT

- Sunglasses may help with sensitivity to light while riding in the car, traveling through the airport or train station, or while flying or riding.
- Books or magazines (e.g., *iSpy*, *Highlights*) may provide visual distractions throughout the trip.
- Visual Schedules to reinforce where the individual needs to be as part of the travel plans (see our Visual Schedules information in this Travel Toolkit).
- Visual supports that encourage calming routines may also be considered, such as steps for deep breathing.
- Small toys that light up, such as magic wands or light-up globes. items with glitter such as a calming glitter jar (*NOTE: Check travel guidelines regarding items permitted on public transportation.*).

SMELL

- Portable scents, such as essential oils, roll-ons, or sprays, may help to promote calming routines and to mask unexpected scents that may be bothersome.

HEARING

- Noise canceling headphones may be useful to help drown out sounds that may be too loud or unexpected.
- Favorite music to help provide a distraction and to promote calming. Consider creating a playlist of favorite movie or TV theme songs or the openers to favorite video games.
- White noise machines can be useful if this is part of a sleep routine at home or to help mask unexpected or new sounds when staying overnight somewhere new.

TASTE

- Favorite snacks can be useful distraction items, while also providing additional sensory input through chewing.
- Chewy tubes (oral devices that provide a resilient, non-food, chewable surface) provide sensory input, and may be particularly helpful for neurodiverse individuals who enjoy them or who may be limited in their diets.

TOUCH

- Fidget toys, such as popular spinners or squishy toys, are typically small and easily packed, and can provide added movement opportunities.
- Comfort items (e.g., favorite toys) should be considered if the individual is able to separate from the item when not in use.
- Kinetic sand, Play Doh, or bubbles are options that provide tactile and visual input, while also serving as fun activities.

Other helpful Distraction Toolkit items include travel versions of favorite games or activities (usually played at home), a tablet with apps for the child to navigate, and coloring books.

Travel-specific Considerations

Plan for the different environments and specific settings that will be encountered, and be prepared for each, unique setting. For example, if a tablet or smart device is part of the Distraction Toolkit, a backup charger or extra battery pack may be needed.

Consider travel restrictions. Some forms of public transportation restrict items and activities permitted (e.g., airlines do not permit child-safe scissors on board).

Some neurodiverse individuals rely on special spaces, such as a “calm down corner,” at home or in a school setting. These can be difficult to replicate



when traveling. Plan ahead to identify “go to” places that could serve as good spots to help individuals who may become overwhelmed. Many US airports have designated quiet spaces for those with sensory issues.

Resources to Create Your Own Distraction Toolkit

More resources for creating a Distraction Toolkit can be found at thesensorytoolbox.com. Samples of Distraction Toolkits are shown below. Visit the "Resources" tab on the Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development website at Autismcenter.duke.edu, for ideas and samples from educational and nonprofit organizations serving individuals with neurodiversities.



Find more resources at [Autismcenter.duke.edu](https://autismcenter.duke.edu)



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