

Where Special Needs is Cool
(Affordable too!)



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For Immediate Release

TEN TIPS TO EASE HOLIDAY TRAVELS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN:

Pediatric Therapist Aviva Weiss Tells How to Prepare for Good Times Together

Philadelphia, PA, December 8, 2008 – The chaos of packing, airport crowds and security, lengthy car rides and yes, even overexposure to family and friends is enough to erode any holiday traveler's festive spirit. Add traveling with children into the equation, especially when special needs are involved, and some parents might wish they could just stay home. But a few preparations, says Fun and Function LLC founder Aviva Weiss, can go a long way toward ensuring a good time for everyone.

Traveling disrupts routines and removes children from familiar surroundings. This can be especially stressful and difficult for children with special needs notes Weiss, a certified pediatric occupational therapist. A mother of four, including a daughter with sensory processing disorder, she says parents of special needs children can pave the way toward less stressful trips by observing these ten guidelines:

- 1. Prepare the child in advance as much as possible.** Practice for the trip for a period leading up to the actual travels. Talk about the upcoming experience to help your child overcome anxiety. Act out or role play anticipated events in advance, from taking off shoes for airport security to applauding after a toast.
- 2. Redirect anxious energy into constructive activity.** To take the edge off the potential anxiety of seeing many less familiar faces all at once, make the event a fun and educational by creating a special activity. Create a small photo album featuring people who will be at the event, and help your child play "Family Bingo," checking off each person he or she greets or sees across the room. Or, create a pictogram of your itinerary or agenda and help your child follow along.
- 3. Encourage creative expression.** For those able to write or draw, a pocket journal or sketchbook for illustrating what they're experiencing can provide another useful outlet. Children who are more observers than participants may appreciate assignments such as taking pictures with a digital camera.
- 4. Don't expect perfection.** Whenever you travel with children, it's best to "expect the unexpected," or at least leave room for something to pop up to divert you from your agenda.

5. **Secure an extra set of hands.** Try traveling with a friend, family member or caregiver to help keep things in order when you're on the move, provide manpower for carrying belongings and an extra set of eyes, and even make bathroom breaks with multiple children an easier task.
6. **Manage expectations for you and your hosts.** A pending visit from a special needs child may produce stress for the host as well as the child and the parent. Prepare everyone by communicating your child's needs in advance and asking for some general ground rules for inside the home, as a gesture toward making the visit as pleasant and peaceful as possible.
7. **Bring along some "friends."** Pack a bag of objects that are fun and familiar. Sensory gadgets/fidgets, noise reduction headphones, weighted vests, or favorite belongings from home will help filter out outside stimuli and provide a comforting connection to "home."
8. **Minimize changes to eating habits.** Try to keep your child's diet consistent to prevent constipation, indigestion, allergic reactions or other adverse developments. Feed your child something satisfying to comfort them before a long trip, and take along favorite utensils as a connection to more familiar situations. Don't expect your child to sit for an entire meal. Rather, prepare a spot where he or she can rest, play or calm down while the meal continues.
9. **RX for safer travels.** Ready a medicine kit with prescriptions, medical information and OTC products to confront fevers, allergies, cuts and other issues that may surface when you travel out of your home.
10. **Preserve the moment but reserve time for breaks.** The ingredients of posing for pictures – people huddled close together, bright flashes, noise and the need to stay still – can lead to overstimulation. Don't oblige your child to participate in all the photos, and be sure to take breaks in between.

"Traveling with a special needs child – or any child, for that matter – needn't be a stressful event," Weiss says. "In fact, it can be a great experience, offering lessons and fond memories for all. The keys are to prepare everyone in advance, include a few fun and familiar items and activities, and above all remember that it takes time and patience to learn how to manage change."

About Aviva Weiss and Fun and Function LLC

Aviva Weiss is founder of Fun and Function LLC, a Merion Station, Pa.-based provider of engaging, durable and functional play and therapy products at affordable prices, including an exclusive line of scooters and portable writing kits. A mother of a child with sensory processing disorder, she is also a certified pediatric occupational therapist with expertise in creating inclusive environments where all children can thrive together, and is currently working with developmental pediatrician Dr. Wendy Ross to guide children's museums toward improving experiences for children with special needs and their families. She previously worked at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and St. Christopher's Hospital, and earned her B.S. in Psychology from Touro College and her Masters in Occupational Therapy from The Richard Stockton College, graduating summa cum laude from both programs.

Weiss launched Fun and Function in 2005 when she first identified her daughter's challenges and was frustrated by the lack of kid-friendly styling and high prices of existing special-needs products. She began designing products that elicit the potential of all children, help them feel good and achieve their best. Today, the company offers hundreds of innovative products marked by affordability and durability, scoring points with parents, pediatric therapists and educators. For more information or a free catalog, visit www.funandfunction.com or call 1-800-231-6329.