

Transporting Autistic Individuals

Public transportation is a helpful tool but can bring some extra challenges for autistic individuals. Some of the difficulties autistic riders may face are sensory overload, anxiety from things that change, or unfamiliar routes. This resource will share information for drivers and aides on steps to take to prepare for transporting autistic individuals, as well as tips for sensory accommodation and providing comforting structure and support.



Preparation

Information sheets — Having information about a rider can be helpful when supporting them. Asking the riders or their caregivers to complete and share these forms can help you best offer support.

- aidinpa.org/resource/all-about-me-form-child/
- aidinpa.org/resource/all-about-me-form-adults/

Visual supports — Social stories and visuals can help explain what the rider should expect and reduce anxiety.

- Route maps and drop-off/pick-up lists
- paautism.org/resource/riding-the-school-bus-social-story/
- paautism.org/resource/adjusting-new-situations-environment-anxiety/



Sensory Accommodations

Sights — Turn off any lights if possible or use sun shades.

Sounds — Allow individuals to wear noise-canceling headphones. Be aware of music type and volume. Understand that some individuals make noises to self-soothe — balance sounds for everyone's comfort.

Textures — Seat belts can be rough, especially near the shoulder and neck. Try adjusting the belt so it rests against the passenger's clothing. Be aware of fabric sensitivity and vehicle temperature.

Smells/Tastes — Minimize the use of scented products like perfume or air fresheners. These can be overwhelming for smell and even taste.

Self-Stimulatory Behavior (Stimming) — Stimming is a way individuals meet a sensory need. This could be rocking or hand flapping. It is best to allow individuals to engage in these behaviors if they are safe for the individual and those around them.



Structured Routines

Keep seating consistent — Assign the same seats when possible, including for aides.

Communicate changes early — If possible, give advance notice of driver, bus, or route changes.

Allow extra time to adjust — When unplanned changes happen, give them time to process. Use a calm voice and offer a preferred item or discuss a special interest topic.

Understanding autism can help keep everyone safe during transportation. It is helpful to watch riders closely, be aware of behavior changes, and have the tools to provide support. Communicate with riders and caregivers often to provide a positive experience for everyone.