



Handy Handouts®

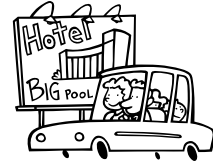
Free, educational handouts for teachers and parents*

Number 439



Traveling and Vacationing with a Special Needs Child

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.



"Life is either a great adventure or nothing." – Helen Keller

Traveling with a special needs child can be quite challenging, but parents should not let their child's disabilities keep them at home. Traveling even the shortest distances and being together as a family override the work it takes to leave the protection and safe walls of home. Special needs children will benefit from (1) seeing different surroundings and sites (to have something new to talk or communicate about), (2) talking or communicating with new people (to practice social skills), and (3) participating in activities or experiences they wouldn't have while sitting at home (gain confidence and independence). No matter where or how far you go to get away for a day or a week-long vacation, **preparation is always the key** to reducing the stress and angst of leaving the familiar. Choosing a destination, doing your research, soliciting advice from experienced parents of special needs children, or finding a travel agent who understands the needs of your family... and just trying to remember everything while preparing for the trip, well, you get the point; **traveling with children is tough!**

Vacation destinations are becoming more sensitive and proactive to the needs of their special guests. Using the internet, you can find literally hundreds of links to places (beach and winter resorts, camping sites, cruise ships, national parks, etc.) dedicated to serving the needs of your child and family, from having simple, gluten-free food menus to having trained and experienced staff members available (even babysitters) to assist you and your child in recreational activities. Many places also have equipment on site such as wheelchairs, motorized wheelchairs, walkers, canes, wagons, etc. Within these websites, you can read the lists of service amenities and accommodations available to your child and family. Read the parent blogs, comments, and ratings about their experiences.

The following tips from parents of special needs children may help you prepare for travel.

Traveling by Car

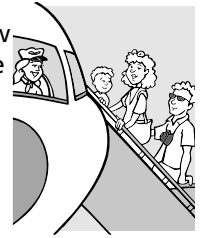
Plan the highway route to your destination before your departure. Always leave home with a full tank of gas. Using a map or GPS, locate rest areas or places for bathroom breaks along the way. Take books, headphones, iPad or tablet, or other entertainment for the drive. You know your child better than anyone. Take along whatever your children will need to entertain themselves along the way.

Mark places along your route where you can stop and take extended breaks before your child, or children, get cranky and restless. For day trips, pack a cooler with food and forget cramming everyone into a table at a restaurant and wasting valuable time. When on the road for a few days, buy lunch to go and GPS to the nearest park so the kids can let off steam before getting back into the car. As much as you want to have enough entertainment in the back seat(s), leave enough space to keep children from being so crowded. Put as much as you can in the trunk (or in a car top carrier). Whether in a car, plane, train, or bus, dress the children comfortably in layers to remove should they get warm or uncomfortable.

Traveling by Train, Plane, or Bus

Rehearse – If no one in your family has flown or ridden a bus or train, check your local airport or stations to see if they offer "practice events" that allow families to go through security, boarding, and a realistic run through of procedures so kids will understand what to expect. Call the carriers directly. Checking off the special services box when booking online isn't enough. Follow up later with a phone call to ask any other questions. At the ticketing counters, employees will direct you to special services areas, and oftentimes, someone will help your family board and help stow your luggage or equipment.

Bring distractions. Pack favorite small toys and games along with a few new items that will hold your child's attention. Thanks to recent changes in government regulations for airlines, most now allow the use of portable electronic devices for the entire flight as long as they're set on airplane mode. Download a few new apps before your trips. Charge devices completely before boarding (there may not be a USB port available on board some smaller or older planes).



Hotels

Think modern. Hotels constructed in 1993 and beyond must legally conform to disability standards (like having a certain number of rooms with roll-in showers). Hotel pools built or altered after 2013* must have one or two means of entry and exit. Some have a lift for disabled guests. Review the emergency exits outside your room and in other areas you might frequent in the hotel. If your child's disability impedes his/her mobility, consider requesting a first floor room/suite in case of an emergency.

Book a suite if at all possible. Chains like *Residence Inn*, *Embassy Suites*, or *Hyatt Houses* offer a living area and bedroom for not much more than a regular room (depending on the area and/or season). Having your entire family in one room for hours at a time is stressful enough. A little more space will give your special needs child (and all of you!) the quiet needed for rest and relaxation, and you'll all enjoy downtime a little more.

Makes specific requests for your child's needs. Send an email along with your online reservation and make your requests—whether it's a mini fridge to store medicines, a bench in the shower for accessibility, plastic cups instead of glass, or a room on the first floor. If you haven't had a reply within several days, call the hotel's booking agent and review your reservation and requests. Take the name of the representative for future contact. At least a week prior to arrival, call the hotel representative you spoke with before and ask again for everything you will need. Call the morning before your arrival and remind them again at check-in.

Be patient. Parents with special needs children will tell you, traveling gets easier with every trip because they now have their routine down to a science. Your first big trip may have its bugs, so take heart – the more you travel, the better you get at it, and the more fun you will have. Traveling with a special needs child (and all children) takes a lot of planning and organization, but the benefits will far outweigh the work. Leave the familiar behind and enjoy a simple day trip or a more extended vacation. The more accustomed your children become to traveling, the better travelers they become!

Resources

Pool Professionals. 2016. ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Pool Lifts: Things We Know. Retrieved June 2016 from <http://poolprofessionals.com/ada-pool-lifts-things-we-know/>

**In January 2012, the Department of Justice published a guidance document in response to the questions raised after the Americans with Disabilities Act 2010 Standards for Accessible Design was officially published. The guidance document titled "ADA 2010 Revised Requirements: Accessible Pools – Accessible Means of Entry and Exit" is an accessory document to the published ADA 2010 Standards, intended to help facilities covered by Title III of the ADA understand specific requirements and compliance.*

More FREE Handy Handouts®, go to www.handyhandouts.com

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com and type in the **item name or number in our search engine**. If you're viewing this Handy Handout on a computer, click the links below to see the product descriptions.

Critical Thinking Take Along
[Item #TA-450](#)

All About You All About Me Fun Deck
[Item #FD-80](#)

Jeepers Peepers
[Item #JP-350](#)

Auditory Memory for Riddles
[Item #FD-81](#)