



Vacation Guide for Parents of Kids with Disabilities

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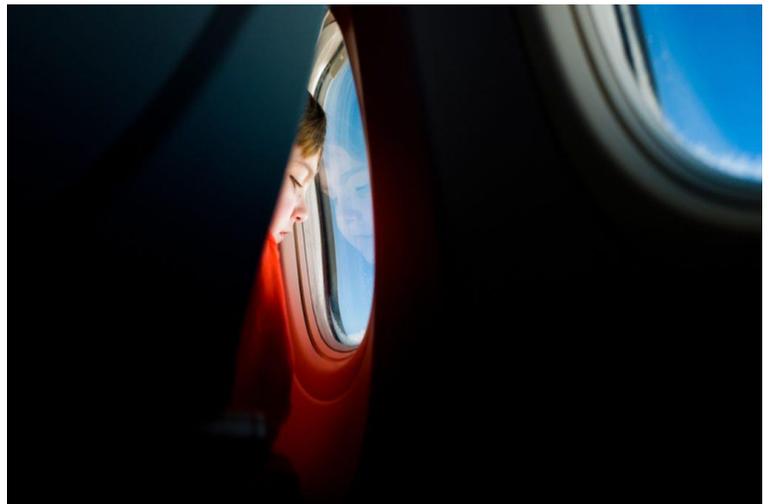
Available Online at: <https://clcnetwork.org/vacation-guide/>

Spring break is coming up soon, and for many families, this can be a week full of change and anxiety. We've put together a guide to make this vacation (whether at home or someplace warm) enjoyable for ALL family members.

Preview your trip:

The internet is amazing. Before leaving on any trip, I can generally check out the layout of my aircraft and see exactly where I will be sitting. I can look up the hotel and view pictures, video footage, and ratings that others have given the hotel. I know what they will serve for breakfast, where I can park, and if they have an in-room coffee pot.

Some children and youth will find it **MUCH** easier to enjoy a vacation if you make them part of your trip preview. There are wonderful YouTube videos for kids to see what happens in the airport (like the security checks, which can be scary if you're not expecting them!) and how an airplane ride will go. Here are two examples to check out from [Baby Gizmo](#) and [CloudMom](#).



Additionally, let your children see the hotel pictures. Show them the sleeping arrangements. Check out the places you may visit and how those day trips may go. You can even write stories together about what **MIGHT** happen on our trip. Make sure you include plenty of words like "maybe", "perhaps", and "probably" so that if trip plans change, your story is still accurate.

Doing a "staycation" can be terrific as well. If you decide to venture away from home to the local zoo or museum, remember to preview that day trip as well. Allowing family members to view those websites can help create landmarks when you actually arrive at your destination. In fact, some families enjoy making a written list of words or pictures to create a treasure hunt so that children can try and find some of the features from the website.

Changes in routine:

One of the joys for some is the change in routine that vacation can bring. But for others, that change in routine is distressing. You may need to agree on some routines for the trip, such as reading or devotions before bedtime, but also allow for changes, such as when showers will happen or what time dinner will take place.

Try to help calm the jagged nerve endings by coming up with a written or picture schedule to look at each day (find printable pictures [on this website](#)).

Carry a calendar where you can show clearly what day you are leaving, when you are returning, and something about each day you are gone. If plans change, make sure you note those new plans on the calendar and schedule. This can be very helpful.

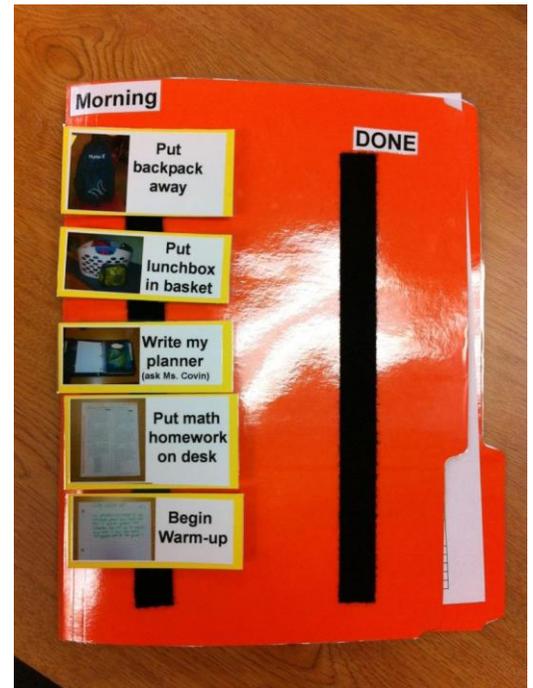
This is also true for families staying close to home. A week without the routine of school or work can bring joy and distress to different members of your family.

Having a stay-home vacation schedule can be a great way to add some predictability.

Use a whiteboard or get a large calendar for the fridge. Gather around to plot special things about each day. Make sure your calendar extends to the day everyone heads back to school or work so that everyone can see that vacation does not last forever. It will have an end date coming up soon. Using a whiteboard gives you the advantage of being able to change plans. If the day is rainy, gather the troops and have them help you erase what was planned and reconfigure your day. Different bedtimes, amount of screen time, family movie time, and special events can easily be embedded into such a calendar. If someone is getting upset about the changes, consult the calendar together to discover what will happen and when.

Remember, sometimes changes in climate and surroundings can bring joy, other times NOT!

Moving from long pants to shorts may be very uncomfortable for some people as the wind and sensations hit the legs differently. The restaurant oatmeal may never be able to compare to the oatmeal Dad makes each morning in the home kitchen. Trading in your TV where you know each channel and turning that into a different set of channels and networks can be difficult for some. Watch for some of these reactions.



Here's a DIY school picture schedule from TheCraftRookie. This can be easily adapted to fit your family's schedule.

If you're traveling, be prepared to take "home" along with you in as many forms as needed. Home oatmeal packets, a favorite TV show or movie, and a variety of clothing options might help ease the transition to a new place. If you know some of the "distress" spots from previous vacations, plan in advance. It's possible, for example, that the hotel will share the TV station listing guide with you for your child to preview before getting to the hotel. You might be able to hold "beach day" in your living room before heading out on vacation. Practice wearing some summer clothing before you leave the house. Pull up some of the menus from restaurants you may visit and allow your child to see what might taste good from those options.

These climate issues may impact children on their staycation as well. As the weather turns warmer over the next few months, watch for issues related to clothing changes. Give children a chance to adjust to the new weather patterns.

When possible, create the chance for children to add some predictability to weather changes.

Using the TV, newspaper, or internet sites, teach a child to see how people can predict the weather. By creating a temperature calendar or journal, a child can see how this is not something that is by chance or random, but a topic people can study and make good guesses to predict. For some children who enjoy being exact, let them keep track and celebrate the days the forecaster gets it exactly correct. Create an extra column for "close guess" or "way off". Again, this lets children know there will be some variation and that a weather forecast is a guess. If you are unexpectedly rained out, you can smile and say, "We will have to put this rain in the 'way off' column for sure."

Plan ahead when you'll eat out during your break. This will help everyone have something to look forward to and plan for, while also keeping reasonable expectations for meals. If you're traveling, having lunch out at a restaurant and dinner from your backpack might be the right balance, and can be an easy way to avoid crowds and long waits.

Plan a vacation photo creation:

Whether at home or away, use this week to plan a photo creation as some individuals really enjoy being in pictures! Since many of us carry multiple devices with the option to take a photo, talk to the family about wanting to get some pictures. For some, it's easier to pose for a picture in the sandy beach and perhaps even in the water than it is to be told to walk in the sand and get in the water. Photo creations sometimes make people a bit more bold, and it's a wonderful way to bring back some memories of your spring break.



Give choices:

When possible, think of choices individuals can make with challenging times or activities.

Being able to choose allows people to feel more in control.

With you, the parent, giving the two choices, you are also creating two acceptable options to you. This might look like: “Would you like to swim in the pool or in the bathtub tonight?”, “Would you enjoy walking on the beach or shall we rent a bike?”, “Would you like to eat breakfast at the table or would you like to take it along in the car?” You can’t always offer a choice, but be creative when you can.

Think for safety:

One parent heading to Disney World had a set of t-shirts printed. It said “I have autism. If I get lost, please call (123) 456-7890. This parent knew the child would be safe even if they were parted. One parent invited to pay for a college student to join the family and help with some of the events. This gave a college student a free vacation while providing options for parents to have a “date” night and an extra pair of hands during the day. Discuss and/or rehearse scenarios your children may experience: when traveling, we always use the buddy system (no one goes anywhere alone), if we lose sight of parents, our plan is _____, etc. Talking to parents who have blazed this trail before can sometimes bring up great ideas for you to try

What about you? What strategies or tips do you have for making your break enjoyable for the whole family?

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