



Humber Sensory Processing Service

Community Services for Children
aged 0-18 years



Advice for travel



Lots of families get really excited about going on holiday! Travelling to new places and seeing new things, can all feel like a big adventure! However, for some children with sensory processing differences, travelling can be very tricky. Not knowing what to expect and lots of new sensory input can be overwhelming. Planning any trip can be stressful, but there are strategies you can try to help you and your child feel a little bit calmer and more prepared.

Time and place

- Give yourself extra time. Allow for changes in traffic or the need for extra breaks. No-one enjoys travelling in a rush!
- Consider what time you are travelling and where from. Can you travel at a quieter time of the year or day? Can you depart from a smaller station or airport? Can you reserve your seats facing forward, or near a toilet or exit?
- Can you contact your travel provider or place of departure before you travel? They may be able to advise on quiet spaces or offer a “pass” for you to avoid a long wait or queue that your child may find distressing.

Practice makes perfect!

- Can you try on holiday clothes in advance? Try them on more than once, and each time, increase the length of time. This allows your child to build their tolerance and adjust to their new clothes. It also gives you the opportunity to replace or alter any clothing your child cannot tolerate before you travel.
- Do you have the internet? Can you access maps and street views on the internet? Use these tools to take a ‘virtual tour’ of the places you will be visiting. Can you involve your child in planning some holiday activities at this point?
- Can you introduce sensory stories, videos, audio clips or smells related to travel before your holiday? This will help your child to know what



to expect and reduce anxiety. Some examples include watching videos of aeroplanes, listening to train horns and announcements, letting your child smell, play with or apply sun lotion.

Being prepared

- Can you take the shower gel/shampoo you use at home with you? The familiar smells and textures will be predictable and calming. It might seem tempting to use the ones provided at the hotel, but the difference in texture or smell may be overwhelming.
- Can your child help you pack? You can discuss with them what you will all need for your holiday and involve them in the task. Try allowing them to choose their own additional “home comforts”, gently setting boundaries on the number of items they can choose (this would not include essential items such as ear defenders.)
- The sunflower lanyard is a recognised symbol of hidden disabilities. Staff are trained to offer appropriate levels of assistance if needed, including extra time or space. This scheme operates in over 160 airports worldwide and can be a good way to increase awareness if you or your child feel comfortable to display it.

Familiarity

- Can you bring some familiar foods and drinks with you? You may need to check import/export rules.
- Children with sensory differences often feel most comfortable at home. Can you stick to some of your same routines whilst on holiday? For example, wake up and bedtimes, mealtimes etc.
- If your child feels able, can you develop a separate routine specifically for holidays. Involve your child in planning what this ‘holiday routine’ might look like and make sure it has a degree of flexibility they are comfortable with. Familiarity and predictability can help reduce anxiety at home and on holiday.



Bus, coach and train

If your child experiences travel sickness, where they are sitting could make a lot of difference. If they can safely sit in the front passenger seat, this is often the best position to manage motion sickness (please double check the highway code, road safety and vehicle rules regarding age, height, and booster seating). It's tempting to give a child a book or tablet for entertainment when travelling but this can increase nausea and dizziness. Some other tips for car travel include:

- Break down your journey if you can. Try stopping for a 5–10-minute movement break every hour. You can change how and when you take these breaks depending on the length of the journey.
- It might help to try going for a gentle walk or focus on stretching and bending during your break. Activating the proprioceptive sense with deep pressure will help their nervous system regulate and might even help with the sickness.
- A child might feel confined when in the car. They might not feel sickness, but they might become restless and agitated. You could plan in a slightly longer break where a park is nearby so they can run, swing, and slide to regulate and release some energy.
- Encourage a short nap during the journey if possible. You might want to make sure that this is not too disruptive to their routine.
- Some children might be sensitive to low frequencies. Music with heavy bass tones can increase nausea, especially if there are speakers in the rear of the car. Bear this in mind if you are selecting music for your journey.
- You are less able to take a break spontaneously in a taxi. You can try and incorporate 'a break' by stopping earlier than your destination and walking the last part of your journey.



When travelling by public transport you often don't have as much control over when, and how you can take a break. You may want to keep these journeys shorter. At times when longer journeys need to be made, think about what you can do to prepare for and after the journey or what accommodations are easy to carry with you. Things to consider are:

- Try to travel facing forwards or have a clear view of the direction you are travelling. This should help reduce sickness.
- Try spraying a handkerchief or toy with a scent your child likes. They can carry this and sniff it to help block out other smells that they do not like.
- Giving your child a heavy backpack to carry. Whether carrying it on their shoulders or resting it on their lap when seated, deep pressure input can be calming.
- Air conditioning and/or heating can make you dehydrated. You might like to carry a flask with your child's favourite drink and try setting timers to drink regularly.
- Drinking through a straw can provide calming proprioceptive input.
- If your child finds it tricky to regulate their temperature, consider travelling in multiple thin layers of clothing. Regularly check in with them to provide prompts to remove items if they are warm.
- You may want to carry a small battery powered fan. The blast of cold air can be regulating.
- If you're going on a longer journey, your child may need more proprioceptive and vestibular input before you set off. Think about how you can plan time for this and which activities they find most regulating.



Boat and plane

Travelling on an aeroplane or boat can be tricky for a lot of reasons. For example, you are under time pressures, to then go through security where lots of people are packed together, often removing their shoes; after that you must walk through the bright lights and strong smells of 'duty free' before boarding a plane/boat with narrow corridors and tight spaces with no way of leaving until you get to the destination. It's easy to see why travelling by plane and by boat can be tricky for a lot of people, especially if you have sensory processing differences! Here are some strategies you might want to consider:

- Let your provider know in advance if you feel you may need some assistance. Having a chat with the crew before, or when you board may be useful. They will be able to offer support such as spending extra time talking through safety information if your child is anxious, or offering a quiet space during safety drills etc.

Boat

- If you can access the deck, being able to see the horizon line offers a focus point and the feel of the cool air can both help reduce sickness.
- There can be a lot of movement on board a ship. Proprioceptive activities help improve your body awareness, balance, and co-ordination. These heavy work activities before and during boat travel may help your child feel more 'grounded'.
- There are often loud sirens or announcements on board, you may want to have noise cancelling headphones or ear plugs available.



Plane

- An aisle seat might be a good option for children who feel restless, claustrophobic or who get travel sick. An aisle seat means they have a bit more space; can get up for a walk (when it is safe to do so) and have quick access to the toilet if they need it. Some airlines let you pre-book specific seats such as nearer to the toilet, or at an emergency exit. Consider contacting them in advance to discuss the options available.
- For some children, a window seat might be a good distraction and they might like to check the progress of the flight. Knowing there is an end point to the journey can provide a focus and reduce anxiety. Consider taking a device with pre-downloaded information about your flight that they can read.
- Some children might find the "full ear" feeling and nausea overwhelming. Sucking a hard boiled sweet, mints or chewing gum can help relieve that pressure. Drinking through a straw or even yawning might also help.
- The air inside the cabin can change your sense of taste, which means airline food contains more sugar and salt. If you have brought your child's favourite snacks, they may taste different or bland.
- Some children with sensory differences may feel like their body or veins are throbbing when travelling on a plane. Lots of drinks, regular movement or tight/compression clothing may be helpful.
- Try spraying a handkerchief or toy with a scent that your child likes. They can carry this and sniff it to help block out other smells such as food or jet fumes.

