

The National Autistic Society  
Head Office  
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG  
Tel: 020 7833 2299  
Fax: 020 7833 9666  
Email: [nas@nas.org.uk](mailto:nas@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)  
PARIS autism resources  
[www.info.autism.org.uk](http://www.info.autism.org.uk)

Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004  
(Mon-Fri 10am-4pm)  
Email: [autismhelpline@nas.org.uk](mailto:autismhelpline@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk/infosheets](http://www.autism.org.uk/infosheets)

Advocacy for Education Service:  
0845 070 4002  
Email: [advocacy@nas.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@nas.org.uk)

Conferences: 0115 911 3367  
Email: [conference@nas.org.uk](mailto:conference@nas.org.uk)

Fundraising: 020 7903 3559  
Email: [fundraising@nas.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@nas.org.uk)

*help!* programme for parents:  
0117 974 8400  
Email: [help.programme@nas.org.uk](mailto:help.programme@nas.org.uk)

Information: 0845 070 4004  
(Mon-Fri 10am-4pm)  
Email: [info@nas.org.uk](mailto:info@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk/infocentre](http://www.autism.org.uk/infocentre)

Membership: 020 7903 3563  
Email: [membership@nas.org.uk](mailto:membership@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk/joinus](http://www.autism.org.uk/joinus)

Parent to Parent: 0800 9520 520  
[www.autism.org.uk/p2p](http://www.autism.org.uk/p2p)

Publications: 020 7903 3595  
Email: [publications@nas.org.uk](mailto:publications@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk/pubs](http://www.autism.org.uk/pubs)

Social programmes: 0115 847 3540  
Email: [socialprogrammes@nas.org.uk](mailto:socialprogrammes@nas.org.uk)  
[www.autism.org.uk/social](http://www.autism.org.uk/social)

Volunteering and Befriending: 0115 911 3369  
Email: [befriending@nas.org.uk](mailto:befriending@nas.org.uk)

NAS Scotland  
Tel: 0141 221 8090  
Email: [scotland@nas.org.uk](mailto:scotland@nas.org.uk)

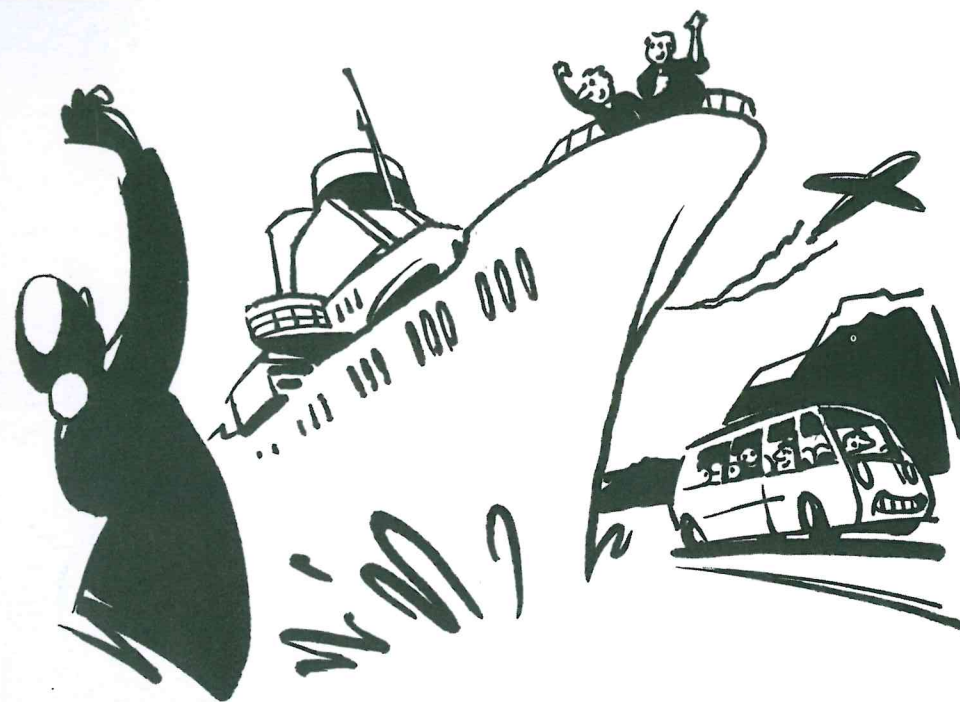
NAS Cymru  
Tel: 02920 629 312  
Email: [wales@nas.org.uk](mailto:wales@nas.org.uk)

NAS Northern Ireland  
Tel: 02890 236 235  
Email: [northern.ireland@nas.org.uk](mailto:northern.ireland@nas.org.uk)



The National Autistic Society is a company limited  
by guarantee. Registered in England No 1205298.  
Registered Office: 393 City Road, London, EC1V  
1NG. Registered as a Charity No 269425.

Code NAS 680  
ISBN 1 905 722 13 3/978 1 905 722 13 6  
© The National Autistic Society 2006



# Going on trips with an Asperger pupil

Judith Colley  
Illustrations by Jess Abbo



# Going on trips with an Asperger pupil

## Introduction

Travel is a wonderful experience, without any doubt, but to a child with Asperger syndrome it can be difficult as it takes away all their structures and safety nets.

After many day trips and also longer stay trips in this country and abroad, I have collected the following tips that have helped staff cope with children who find travelling difficult.

Children with Asperger syndrome have problems in three areas:

- communicating
- social relationships
- lack of imagination and creativity.

Pupils with ASD like structure and routine.

## Getting started

It is crucial to start introducing the place/country of visit very early on.

Start by looking at the atlas, or maybe computer programme such as Multimap or Google Earth, if the child has an interest in using computers. Talk about the place/country, weather, people and language. Research as much as possible so that the pupil becomes familiar with it.

If possible, arrange a 'Foreign Day' in school and base lessons round this. Bake pizzas, decorate with flags painted in art, play suitable music and make sure everyone tries to dress with at least one foreign item of clothing: a striped T-shirt, beret and a string of onions can work wonders!



Pay special attention to borders that you might cross and the distance from home. Don't forget to mention any time or language differences.

Explain that policemen in other countries may be armed. I once travelled with a boy who was most distressed to see a policeman with a gun and wanted to know if he was a policeman or a soldier.

Talk about similarities or differences, for example how post boxes or telephone boxes might look, or how to recognise important places like police stations.

An overnight visit is obviously the best way to start off. Do not go straight into a three-day visit! If a school trip is the first long journey or overnight stay the child has ever been on, it may be better to introduce the concept of travelling early, and have lots of graded practice runs. For example, the family could go on gradually longer car journeys at the weekend and practise things such as stopping at service stations.

It may be possible for the family to go on a short trip on other modes of transport, to prepare the child for the differences, for example a journey on a coach or boat.

Overnight stays can also be graded, from staying with a relative or friend at home initially, then at their house. It may then be possible for the child to stay overnight in their own room (or with a sibling or friend) in a hotel or B&B. In this way, each of the separate elements of the trip, while new, will not be completely unexpected.

Once the child becomes familiar with the place/country, talk about the date of the visit and make a countdown chart or calendar.

Monday		7 ✓	14 ✓	21 ✓	28
Tuesday	1 ✓	8 ✓	15 ✓	22 ✓	
Wednesday	2 ✓	9 ✓	16 ✓	23 ✓	
Thursday	3 ✓	10 ✓	17 ✓	24 🚗	
Friday	4 ✓	11 ✓	18 ✓	25	
Saturday	5 ✓	12 ✓	19 ✓	26	
Sunday	6 ✓	13 ✓	20 ✓	27	

Calendars allow the person with Asperger syndrome to mark off time either by ticking or covering up dates to show them the time left until the trip.

### Three weeks to go...

Make a list of things to take:

- bag for boot of bus – clothes, shoes, toiletries etc
- bag for journey – books, games, pens, cool box for snacks on the way. Maybe a blind fold, as I have found that this, along with ear plugs, helps pupils to envisage 'night' on a long journey.

Talk about position of seat:

- window or aisle?
- not near the loo if they have a germs phobia
- do they want to sit near or not near to someone?

Explain about toilet stops on the journey and explain what is available at a service station.

Rooming is a very important issue.

Explain carefully what this entails and enlist the help of understanding pupils, if sharing is an option.

### Two weeks to go...

Change pounds into Euros if needed and make a simple conversion chart for the child's purse, or allow them to have an electronic currency converter if appropriate. The conversion of currency may be a particular strength for some children with strong maths skills, and they could become a useful resource to other children on the trip who may need help figuring out the cost of items.

A small but vital point I have found is to take two purses: one for 'home' and one for 'abroad'. Not only does this help with the structure of the journey but I have never done a school trip where someone has not left a purse in a service station. Better to lose £20 than all their Euros!

Go through the visit programme. It may help a child to make a diary with forthcoming events and excursions listed. They can then tick off the days.

If known, provide the child with a picture of the hotel or campsite, to enable them to picture where they will be staying.

## One week to go...

Arrange a meeting with parents.

Check medical and any other crucial details, however insignificant. For example, a child may only be able to sleep with a small night light on.

Talk with the pupil in front of the parent. Make sure that the child knows that you are acting as a parent during the trip. It may help the child's understanding to have the parents sign an agreement giving the parents' 'permission'. I have been grateful on more than one occasion for this!

Discuss before the trip what the 'rules for the holiday' are going to be and, for able people, put this in writing in the form of a contract that they can refer back to if needed.

Have a named person that the pupil can go to throughout the holiday if they are anxious about something.

Arrange a time convenient to the parents for the child to ring home on a daily basis.

Give written instructions regarding the trip, times, contact numbers etc. Give a phone number that the parents can ring if they require further details.



## On the day...

Arrive early to be waiting when the child arrives so there is no time for anxiety.

Collect any medicine from the parents.

You may consider taking a familiar duvet and pillow case cover (hard I know if you have a coach full of pupils, but when staying over somewhere it can really help settle some of them).

Keep farewells brief and board the coach as soon as possible.

Have a simple work sheet ready to hand: looking out for sign posts or car number plates etc, anything to focus on. You can use the child's particular interests or strengths here, in ensuring that the journey itself is fun. Word or number games can help pass the time.

People with Asperger syndrome often dislike delays but sometimes these cannot be helped! Having a bag with crisps, sweets etc works wonders – not exactly healthy but food can be a great stress reliever and a comfort/reward.

Once the journey has begun, make sure that the driver gives you the time for the first stop. Talk about the service station again and whether they want to buy a drink and/or snack. Money can be given out in small amounts. Make sure they take their English purse only – leave Euros on the bus.

Give the child a card to put in their pocket. Explain that it must only be shown to staff wearing an identity badge if they have a problem.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I am on a school trip from \_\_\_\_\_

My bus company is \_\_\_\_\_

In case of a problem, please phone \_\_\_\_\_

I have found it helpful to Asperger pupils to cross by ferry, if possible in day light. This helps to make the distinction between home and abroad. I have found that the EuroTunnel does not break up the journey as effectively and the child does not have the benefit of seeing Dover disappear and France appear.

On the ferry the child will need the card again. Hopefully it will not be needed but it gives the child a sense of security.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I am on a school trip from \_\_\_\_\_

My bus company is \_\_\_\_\_

We are parked on \_\_\_\_\_

(Write in deck and stair etc on the ferry)

In case of a problem, please phone \_\_\_\_\_

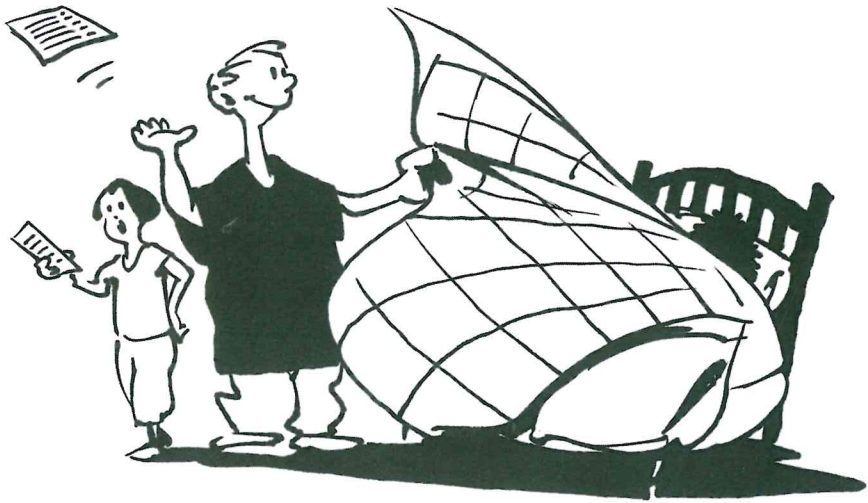
Examples of cards for helping pupils on the trip –  
handy reminders!

Meet Mrs Colley at 8 pm by the coach/shop etc

Meet Mrs Colley at 3 am by the reception desk etc

The National Autistic Society produces helpful information cards and Autism Alert cards with bullet points about autism and Asperger syndrome. These are available online @ [www.autism.org.uk/resources](http://www.autism.org.uk/resources)  
Or from the NAS distributor:  
Central Books Ltd,  
99 Wallis Road,  
London E9 5LN  
Tel: 0845 458 9911

The Autism Alert card is available in several foreign languages: see [www.autism.org.uk/languages](http://www.autism.org.uk/languages)



### In the resort

Once settled into the hotel, a phone call home often helps both child and parents. For the child it is a 'goal achieved' to have reached the destination, for the parent at home a welcome relief.

An activity sheet should be given to the child on the evening before planned activities.

The child can be prepared for each day by asking questions like:

- what does the child need to know to help them feel ok?
- what can staff do to help the day go well?
- what can the child do if they are feeling worried/stressed/overloaded?
- what to do in emergencies.

The answers to these questions can be written down. If the child carries the answers around, they can be prompted to refer to their plan of action if they notice that they are becoming worried.

Example of an activity sheet.

#### Day

Monday

#### Time and place of departure

Front door at 8 am

#### What I need to do

Set alarm for 6.30 am, wash, dress, pack day bag

Be down for breakfast for 7.30 am

#### Destination/activity

Sea World, viewing fish and animals behind glass

Due to leave Sea World at around 5 pm

Return to hotel for shower and change of clothes

Evening meal at 6.30 pm

Ring home at 7.30 pm.

Once again a card should be given to the child with details as explained above, in case of becoming separated from the school party.

If the child does not want to join in a social event or disco, this may be because they are feeling a little unsettled. I have found it worthwhile to discuss the day with them in a quiet corner.

It might help them to write two positive and two negative things about the day, then talk about what went well and what didn't:

- what could I have done better today?
- what was the best thing that happened?
- if I visit this place again I will.....



Hopefully everything went well but this small routine fills a gap in the evening and gives the child scope to off-load any stress.

Take each day as it comes and modify the activity sheet to suit the mood and activity planned.

### **Leisure time**

Unstructured leisure time may be the most difficult as the pupil may not know what to do with himself. Taking books, Lego etc may help deal with this. It is worth trying to fill unstructured times with activities such as walks and swimming but this can be quite exhausting!

In our school we like to use evenings for pupils with Asperger syndrome to work on scrap books and diaries. They generally prefer this quiet time to the noise of the disco and they enjoy collecting postcards, tickets etc during the day, sticking these in and writing their day up. We leave gaps where appropriate for photos which they develop or print when they get home and some pupils enjoy doing further research after the holiday.

We leave the finished diaries and scrapbooks on display in the school languages department. They are a helpful resource for other pupils when they are thinking of going on a school trip and parents also find them interesting and reassuring.

If you are travelling with a pupil who is likely to lock himself out of his room, it is worth keeping the keys to save numerous trips to reception. Writing down what to do if locked out also helps.

### **Return journey**

Give out similar cards as on the outward journey.

Agree a time to phone home on the way.

### **Summing up**

These are guidelines only but I have based them on experience, trial and error and consultation with other people who work with children and adults with Asperger syndrome.

Each child with Asperger syndrome is different and being away from home is a major step.

Each of the stages can be modified to suit age and ability.

Taken carefully you can support a child on an 'incredible journey' in their life and forge a bond that will never be forgotten. I can honestly say that you don't know a child with Asperger syndrome fully until you have travelled with one.

## Recommended reading

### Books

Beaney, J and Kershaw, P (2006) *Inclusion in the secondary classroom: support materials for children with autistic spectrum disorders*  
London: The National Autistic Society

Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council (1998) *Asperger syndrome – practical strategies for the classroom: a teacher's guide*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

South Gloucestershire Council (2005) *Guidelines for working with pupils with ASD in key stages 3 and 4*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

Whitaker, P (2001) *Challenging behaviour and autism: making sense – making progress*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

### Booklets

Colley, J (2004) *Working with an Asperger pupil in secondary schools*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

Thorpe, P (2003) *Moving from primary to secondary school: guidelines for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

Thorpe, P (2004) *Understanding difficulties during break time and lunchtime at secondary school: guidelines for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

Thorpe, P (2005) *Bullying and how to deal with it: a guide for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders*.  
London: The National Autistic Society

All these books and booklets are available from Central Books Ltd, distributors for NAS Publications:  
Central Books Ltd  
99 Wallis Road  
London E9 5LN  
Tel: 0845 458 9911  
Fax: 0845 458 9912  
Email: [nas@centralbooks.com](mailto:nas@centralbooks.com)  
Or order online @ [www.autism.org.uk/pubs](http://www.autism.org.uk/pubs)

Judith Colley has worked with pupils with Asperger syndrome in Cleveland for many years. She has written this guide to help school staff and parents plan for school trips and other travel.

Jess Abbo has worked for many years as a cartoonist and illustrator.