

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Travel and Vacations with a Level 2/3 Autistic Adult

Many families stop traveling entirely once the logistics start to feel impossible. They don't have to. The logistics are learnable, and a real program exists specifically to make air travel manageable.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · THE PROGRAM MOST FAMILIES HAVE NEVER HEARD OF

72

HOURS IN ADVANCE TSA CARES RECOMMENDS YOU CALL BEFORE FLYING

A free program built specifically to arrange screening accommodations before you ever reach the airport. Most families discover it by accident, if at all.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Travel starts to feel impossible

Sensory overwhelm, flight anxiety, and unfamiliar logistics push many families to simply stop traveling altogether.



STEP 2

Real programs exist to help

TSA Cares and airline disability assistance programs are built specifically for exactly this situation, free of charge.



STEP 3

Preparation, not avoidance, is what actually works

A specific plan for air travel, road trips, and family events turns an impossible-feeling trip into a manageable one.

What to prepare before any trip

TSA Cares contact	Call at least 72 hours ahead for air travel
Airline disability assistance line	Separate from general customer service
A sensory comfort kit	Headphones, familiar items, comfort objects
Medication plan	Time zone adjustments, backup supply, access to care
A flexible itinerary	Built-in downtime and backup plans for each day

THE FLIGHT THE FAMILY THOUGHT WAS IMPOSSIBLE

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The Alvarez family hadn't flown anywhere in six years, certain the airport alone would be too much for their son. A friend mentioned TSA Cares almost in passing. They called four days before their flight, arranged a private screening area and extra time, and boarded without the meltdown they'd spent years assuming was inevitable. It wasn't easy. It also wasn't the disaster they'd been avoiding for six years.

SIX YEARS OF ASSUMED IMPOSSIBILITY ENDED WITH ONE PHONE CALL FOUR DAYS BEFORE A FLIGHT.

What matters, at a glance

TSA Cares

A free, dedicated program to arrange screening accommodations for travelers with disabilities before you reach the airport.

Airline disability assistance

Most major airlines have a dedicated disability assistance line, separate from general customer service, worth calling directly.

Sensory overwhelm is the biggest barrier

Airports and planes concentrate nearly every difficult sensory element at once. Preparation specifically targets this, not just logistics.

Road trips offer more control

Driving allows for flexible pacing, familiar food, and predictable stops in a way air travel simply can't match.

Family events need their own plan

Weddings, funerals, and reunions carry unique pressure and unpredictability that deserve a specific strategy, not just general travel prep.

Medication and medical prep can't be an afterthought

A clear plan for medication timing across time zones and access to care while traveling belongs in the plan from the start.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ TSA Cares contact information: 1-855-787-2227

☐ Your specific airline's disability assistance line

☐ A packed sensory comfort kit

☐ A medication plan covering time zones and backup supply

☐ A flexible itinerary with realistic downtime built in

YOUR MOVE

When you're planning your next trip, here is where to start

1

Call TSA Cares at least 72 hours before any flight.

2

Contact your airline's disability assistance line directly.

3

Pack a sensory comfort kit specific to your family member's needs.

4

Build a medication and medical access plan for the trip.

5

Create a flexible itinerary with built-in downtime.

6

For family events specifically, plan an exit strategy in advance.

Six years of not traveling ended with one phone call. The logistics were never actually impossible. They were just unfamiliar.

TRAVEL RESOURCES

TSA Cares (tsa.gov/travel/passenger-support, 1-855-787-2227) helps arrange screening accommodations for travelers with disabilities in advance of a flight.

Contact your specific airline's disability assistance line directly for gate, boarding, and in-flight accommodation requests.

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jim Palasty is the founder of OASIS for Autism and a single father of an adult autistic daughter in Michigan.