



TIP SHEET

Helping Children Cope with Parent Separations

Having a parent travel or live away from home is difficult for any child, but especially for a child with autism. Children with autism rely on predictability and are comforted by familiar routines. Helping children prepare for significant changes prior to the departure and prior to the return will help make things more comfortable for everyone. Here are some tips for helping your child adjust:

Make the transitions as predictable as possible, and establish expectations for what the change and separation will be like. Allow time for your child to understand what is ahead.

Set the Expectation

- Social stories are helpful in providing an expectation of what is to come.
- Write a simple narrative that explains when the change will occur, what it will be like, and what may seem different in the home.
- Read the same story every day for at least two weeks prior to the event.
- Use a calendar or other visual device to “countdown” to the big day. Do not present the situation as a bad thing.

Create Predictable Routines

- It is important for your family to have reliable routines. Children - especially those with autism - rely on predictable daily and weekly events for keeping stress low.
- Create daily routines for chores, TV time, and homework, and be sure to set aside some special time with mommy or daddy.
- Create routines that help you!

When you are parenting alone, it is easy to lose sight of just how much stress you are under. Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your child.

Find Support

- Join or create a support group. Gathering a small group of parents together who are dealing with parenting issues on their own can be an enormous help. Having a shared focus helps you accomplish the specific goals you need to address to relieve stress.
- Sign your child up for activities outside the home. Help your child develop personal interests by enrolling him or her in one of the three C’s — classes, clubs, or camps — to increase the probability of making friends, finding a new hobby, becoming more independent, and trying new things.