



UF-Gainesville Center For Autism and Related Disabilities

Tips for eating out

Advanced Planning Makes a Difference

- Where are you going?
- Is there stuff for your child do to there?
- What type of environment is it? Bright, loud, etc.?
- Has your child been there before?
- Will you have to wait?
- Can you access the menu online in advance?
- Are picture menus available?
- Call ahead to ask about celebrations, noises, etc. to expect



Planning, cont.

- Add “going to restaurant” on your calendar or first/then board
- Add picture of restaurant to your daily schedule or travel book
- Count down ‘sleeps’ until your restaurant trip
- Visit the restaurant in advance



Planning, cont.



- Prep pics of the menu options in advance if there is no picture menu available
- Practice “going out to eat” at home using role play
- Watch videos of kids eating out
- Rehearse on your way to the restaurant: expectations
- Social stories

At the restaurant

- Do not ask the server to bring your child's food before yours. Instead, bring a few small snacks if your child is hungry before the food arrives
- Bring activities in an activity bag, but only allow your child to play with one at a time. Keep the others out of sight
- Plan breaks away from the table. At least one before the food arrives



At the restaurant, cont.

- Start small. If your goal is a one-hour restaurant visit, shoot for 15 minutes (think fast food), then 25, 35, etc. until your child can tolerate an entire hour

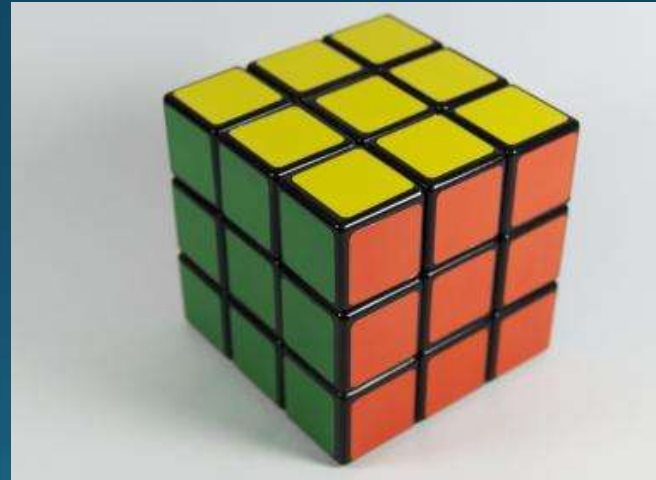


- Tell your child what is happening during the meal. (“We are coloring while we wait for our food.” “We are going to eat and then go to the store.” “Ten more minutes and we are going to leave.”)

More ideas

- Use a first/then board
- Follow up the restaurant visit with a preferred activity or reward

- Fidget toys



- Timer

- Consider giving the server your credit card ahead of time in case you need to leave early...

First/then: sitting at table

FIRST



Sit at table

THEN



Get cotton candy

What to do about “helpful” onlookers

- You can ignore them
- You can “educate” them
- You can “thank” them
- You can...?



Other considerations



- Booths are usually better than tables
- Consider asking for a corner, quiet area, or dimly lit area
- At first, try to avoid buffets and restaurants at their busiest times
- Consider dining outdoors, on the patio, etc. at first
- Hide the condiments!
- Do not allow for inappropriate behaviors; you don't want to set a precedent
- Offer CHOICES

Final thoughts



- Start small and go slow: maybe just an appetizer or dessert outing first?
- Remember why you are dining out
- Don't let the opinions or reactions of other diners discourage you
- Remember the difference between skill and motivation deficit
- Keep your eyes out for “precursor behaviors” that may indicate that a meltdown is imminent—redirect if you can
- Keep trying; if you avoid restaurants, your child will not have enough practice to be successful