

PFA Tips

Going to the Library

Long gone are the days of the card catalog and the little cards in the backs of books to be date stamped. Today's libraries are high tech, offer audio and visual tools, kid-friendly play areas, and some even offer sensory experiences. So let's prepare to visit. (Is there really ANY PLACE our families DON'T need to prepare for?)

Play Secret Service and do a little advance scouting

Make a trip without your child during the time frame you plan to visit together. Is it crowded? Noisy? How bright is it? Are the items your child is going to be most interested in accessible? Based on this recon visit, do you think this is an environment where your child can succeed? Is the staff willing to help with accommodations? Also, are there programs offered by the library that your child might see and go into meltdown if he is over/under the program age limit?

Take the tour together

Ask your library staff to show you and your child where things are located (include non-book and resource items, such as the bathroom) and what is available to use. Encourage the librarian to present the tour to your child (not just to you), and also encourage your child to ask questions (this may require additional communication tools).

Pack fidgets and other calming tools

I think this tip is in every article we've put out. You know that feeling of overwhelming panic when you leave the house and realize you've forgotten your phone? And all you can think about is the phone, and where you left it, and how soon can you get it? Same feeling with the forgotten favorite fidget item. If anxieties become raised, you want that comfort item in hand.

"What of the millions of topics that exist in the world do you want to read about?"

I would feel overwhelmed myself if I thought I had to come up with an answer. I'm sure you wouldn't phrase it that way, but that's how the question could feel to your child. Avoid open ended questions. Try offering choices, such as, "Do you want to read about dinosaurs or people?" Or offer pictures or written lists of topics to choose from.

Just when you think your child isn't listening to the story...

Years ago when my son was a toddler, I remember reading books to him while he sat on the floor and put together Thomas the Tank Engine sets. Not only was he not paying attention to anything I was reading, he was talking to the train characters as he played with them. Knowing he wasn't listening to me, I'd sometimes paraphrase. I discovered he WAS listening because he'd correct me.

Social stories aren't just books in the library

Social stories, developed by Carol Gray, are stories that provide information to individuals on what to do in certain situations. It prepares them for new experiences or scenarios by calmly walking them through what they should expect. They also present social situations and responses. Download the sample social story, "Going to the Library" in the additional resources section.



Are we there yet?

Do you notice a reduction in your child's anxiety if you have a visual schedule? (For some, these visual tools can create extra anxiety if the schedules can't be exactly followed.) If you're thinking, "A visual schedule would be great. If only I didn't have to take the time to make one more thing." Then you're in luck because Nicole Caldwell, M.Ed. of PositivelyAutism.com already created schedule cards you can use (see additional resources).

Rules rule

Our kids are rule and routine oriented. Present the rules and expectations of the library visit. And to take the pressure off of you as being the Mighty Rule Dictator, I'll offer up a set of "Library Rules" you can print and take with you as a visual reminder (see additional resources).

Shhhhhhhhh!!!!!!

Although libraries today aren't exactly the same pristine, you could hear a pin drop, institutes they were a couple of decades ago, they also aren't meant to be

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Going to the Library – continued



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Chuck-E-Cheese replacement centers. So, if a meltdown occurs, the sounds may resonate throughout the building. As we know, in EVERY situation like this, there will be people who understand, and those who we might secretly wish trip over a large rock on the way out. It's for that group of people, we'll just call "the less informed", that we've developed a wallet size card you can pass out without needing to say a word (see additional resources).

My kid is thinking, "You know what would make this visit better? A dog."

Companion dogs are GREAT reading buddies, and are actually being used in many libraries today. Dogs don't judge if you make reading mistakes, and they are proven to often (notice I didn't say always) reduce anxiety in people of all ages. Karma Dogs (<http://www.karmadogs.org/>) is a Maryland organization that partners with libraries to give kids a cuddly reading buddy.

Make it a before-hours party

If you know that libraries are an overwhelming environment for your child, ask the library manager if it's possible for your child to come 15 minutes before the library opens.

Suggest or start a book club for adolescents or adults

Many of us (myself included), are guilty of forgetting that ASD does not only present in children. Each year more and more adults are being diagnosed. Starting a book club at your local library may be a great opportunity to engage with others in the community in a more quiet, low-key environment.

Additional Resources

Going to the Library Social Story

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/library-social-story.pdf>

Library Visual Schedule

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/library-visual-schedule.pdf>

Library Rules

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Library-Rules.pdf>

Autism Resource Kit For Libraries

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Library-Resource-Kit.pdf>

Social story, "Going to Story Time at the Public Library" by Margaret Polischek and Karen Hagerman, Harford County Public Library

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Going-to-the-Library-by-Harford-Co-Public-Libraries.pdf>

"My Child Has Autism" Wallet Cards

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/my-child-has-autism-wallet-cards/>

Written by Shelly McLaughlin,
Director of Safety Programs,
Pathfinders for Autism

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