

Sensory Strategies for Public Outings

Public outings can be exciting but overwhelming for children with sensory needs. These strategies will help you prepare, navigate, and enjoy outings while supporting your child's sensory regulation.

1. Plan Ahead

- **Research the Location:** Look for sensory-friendly features like quiet zones, sensory rooms, and times the location is the quietest and less overwhelming.
- **Pack a Sensory Kit:** Include favourite items like noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, chewy toys, fidget tools, or a weighted lap pad.

2. Prepare Your Child

- **Talk About the Plan:** Use simple explanations or visual aids to show what will happen.
- **Role-Play Scenarios:** Practice situations they might encounter, like waiting in line or ordering food.
- **Set Expectations:** Explain rules or behaviours in a way they understand, like "We'll hold hands in busy areas."

3. During the Outing

- **Stay Flexible:** Be ready to adjust your plans if your child feels overwhelmed.
- **Take Breaks:** Find a quiet corner or bring a blanket for a quick sensory break.
- **Monitor Sensory Input:** Adjust lighting, noise, or clothing layers to ensure comfort.
- **Engage Their Senses:** Use calming strategies like breathing exercises, favourite music, or a familiar snack.

4. Handling Sensory Overload

- **Recognise Early Signs:** Look for indicators like covering ears, pacing, or withdrawal.
- **Act Quickly:** Move to a quieter space or offer soothing activities, like squeezing a stress ball.
- **Be Patient:** Understand that meltdowns may happen despite preparation—stay calm and supportive.

5. Reflect Afterward

- **Talk About the Experience:** Highlight positive moments and gently discuss any challenges.
- **Learn for Next Time:** Note what worked well and what you can adjust for future outings.
- **Celebrate Successes:** Praise your child for any effort they made, no matter how small.