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Special Needs Kids require special consideration for summer travel plans

[Special Needs Kids Examiner](#) • Heather Sedlock



As summer is now under way, parents of special needs children are planning trips of various kinds: some day trips close to home, long distance trips to theme parks, visits to family and so on. There are special factors to take into consideration when planning a trip if your child has special needs.

Dr. Scott L. Barkin, a New York State Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Certified School Psychologist with twenty-five years experience in public education and programs for special needs children and adults, agreed to offer advice about this important topic. Dr. Barkin serves as the Executive Director of [Block Institute](#), a not-for-profit, non-sectarian agency serving developmentally delayed children and adults.

Examiner: What reasonable accommodations can parent expect traditional hotels and inns to make for the special needs family?

Dr. Barkin: Reasonable accommodations would include, but not be limited to:

- modified meal preparation (including puree);
- adjoining rooms;
- quiet floor;
- identification of medical centers &/or hospitals with directions and phone numbers,
- reasonable accessibility to amenities, and
- seating location in the dining room.

Examiner: Are there any websites that you'd recommend that have trip-planning tools for these families?

Dr. Barkin: There are plenty of online resources available for identifying a destination as well as planning tips. The ones listed below provide a global resource:

[Travel Consumer](#)
[Disability Travel and Recreation Resources](#)
[TSA Government Site](#)
[Disney Family Fun](#)

Examiner: For kids with ADHD, should the activities on the trip be more structured or less to prevent behavioral outbursts? What about for kids with autism?

Dr. Barkin: No matter the nature of the disability, success is based on adhering to what you know works for your child and your family. If the family has routines at home that work...incorporate those routines into the trip.

Examiner: If trips haven't gone well in the past, due to the environment's newness, is there anything a parent can do ahead of time to make it easier?

Dr. Barkin: As stated above, routines work. Bring preferred items, clothes etc. Adhere to sleep routines, eating schedules, preferred foods, etc. Discuss the trip ahead of time; explore the "newness" through pictures, brochures and conversation prior to traveling. Talk with your network of family and friends who may have traveled before you to see what worked for them and what destinations worked for them. Learn from others experiences. Remember, following the trip's end, document the successes and the challenges that occurred on the trip so that future trips incorporate what you learned.

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Thank you to Dr. Barkin for his time and expertise in this area.

If you have any tips and tricks for successful trip planning, please leave them in the comments below.