



The Experience of Adults on the Autism Spectrum in the Airport.



We interviewed three adults on the autism spectrum in detail about their experiences of going through the airport. We explored the challenges they faced and strategies they used to overcome these. While this was a small study, some of the very interesting findings may be of use to other people as they use the airport.

The Airport Experience

Individuals on the autism spectrum reported a number of difficulties when getting through the airport. These are outlined below.

- The unfamiliarity of the airport environment was one of the bigger challenges faced. This was associated with the numerous activities going on within the airport and the size of the building itself.
- The movement and behaviour of other passengers was challenging.
- Auditory overstimulation caused by background noises created by other people and tannoy announcements was another of the biggest challenges reported.
- The security process was described as frustrating but unavoidable due to regulations.
- Potential concerns of tactile stimulation when going through security if a frisk search was required were reported.
- Difficulties with queueing and long waiting times during check-in, security and boarding processes were identified.

However, going through the airport was not an entirely negative process. Adults on the autism spectrum explained that:

- They were able to follow airport signage which was clear and easy to understand.
- Exiting the airport provided a sense of relief as the person was moving onwards in their journey.

Overcoming Difficulties

Despite the challenges encountered individuals on the autism spectrum were able to get through the airport. They reported using several strategies to overcome the difficulties they faced. These included:

- Travelling with somebody they knew personally who provided support.
- Availing of assistance available within the airport.
- Avoiding areas where overstimulation was likely to occur. For example, finding a quiet area in the airport.
- Planning their trip for when the airport would be quieter.
- Arriving at the airport ahead of time to ensure that they got through the airport on time and could deal with any problems that might occur.
- Availing of early and late boarding to avoid queueing and waiting times.
- Doing an activity which reduced sensory overload and distracted the person from the environment. Activities used by autistic adults included listening to music through headphones, reading books, playing games on their phones, completing relaxation and deep breathing exercises, and playing with fidget toys or stress relievers.



Did You Know?

All airports are required to provide assistance to passengers who may experience difficulties when traveling through the airport. This is known as 'assistance to persons with reduced mobility'. Contact the specific airports and airline to see what services are available to you, if required.

Service Improvement

Despite the benefits of availing of airport assistance autistic adults made a number of possible recommendations.

1. To increase awareness of the availability of airport assistance among the autistic community.
2. To consider terminology other than 'persons with reduced mobility' in order to increase inclusion of all disabilities.
3. Having an identifiable place or staff member to go to within the airport if assistance or support is required.
4. Consideration of creation of sensory rooms and/or quiet areas within airports to facilitate autistic people.