

Travelling on public transport routine



Catching a bus, train or ferry can be an exciting yet daunting experience with young children with additional needs. Some preparation will help to keep the trip fun.

It is important for the parent/carer to remain calm and unhurried as much as possible so remember to allow extra time and to plan for unexpected changes.

Some things are out of our control but if children are prepared and have opportunities for active involvement while waiting, there is a greater chance your trip will be an enjoyable one.

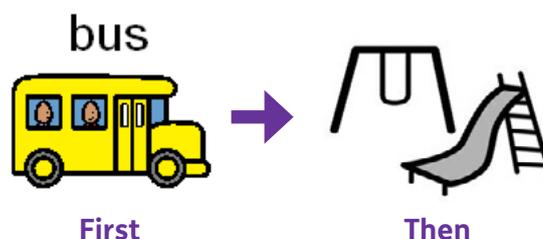
Before you go

Preparation is the key to the success of any routine. You may like to spend some time exploring travelling on public transport ahead of time, and in the home environment where children feel safe and secure.



You may like to:

- Have fun together while pretending to 'go on a bus'. Put some chairs in a row in the living room and a teddy can drive while you hold hands to get on and off the bus. You can swipe the Opal card. Talk about where you are going and what you will do once you get there. Play some bus games together (see below).
- Read stories about catching public transport and talk about trains or buses when you see them when you are out for a walk.
- If travel on public transport has been challenging before, start with a very short trip (one-stop) to a desirable destination for the child such as the park. Slowly build up on this experience by adding one more stop or going at a different time of day.
- Talk about the fun things you will do while you are out – visit the park or buy new crayons. You could use photos to make a visual schedule (eg first we go on the bus and then we will play in the park).





Supporting your child's sensory needs

- Bring crunchy food and a drink bottle with a straw. Chewing and sipping will help children to stay calm and regulated. Perfumed food such as mandarin pieces can help offset strong odours.
- If your child reacts to noise, bring headphones so they can listen to music, or sunglasses if they react to light. If your child is very active, ask them to carry a small backpack with a bottle of water in it. The weight is calming for some children.
- Think about the best time to go. If you can, plan your trip for when your child has just eaten, will not be too tired and when the public transport will be quieter. This is not always possible.
- It may also be helpful to consider what sensory resources may further support your child, for example, would they like access to a fidget toy.

On the day

- It may be helpful for some children to be provided a verbal or visual reminder of the day's activities, for example, you may like to communicate, "Today we are getting the bus."
- Look up the timetable and have your Opal card ready.
- Pack a snack and a drink and a book or a toy. You could tie the toys onto the pram if there is a chance of losing them. Bring some handwash and a change of clothes if necessary.

- Decide if you are happy for your child to swipe the Opal card. Also think about whether you are happy to let your child press the button for your stop - for some children, learning to wait can be challenging.
- Try to not fit too many jobs into your day out so you can return home while your child is still happy.
- Travelling is a great opportunity for you and your child to form enriching connections. Being present promotes opportunities for fun and meaningful interactions.
- Consider opportunities for you and your child to interact, for example, can you play "I spy," or count the number of items you pass.

Waiting time

- While you are waiting for the bus you could sing 'Wheels on the Bus'. For children with an interest in numbers, tell your child the bus number you need and ask them to help look for the numbers while at the bus stop.
- Read a book about what you will see - **All About Street Signs** by David Nabor encourages looking out for and matching road signs which can be a great game while on the bus.
- Look out the window for a car like grandma's or count the dogs.
- Draw a simple map of where you are going and discuss the route. For children who can recognise letters, have them look out for names like Big W.
- If you are travelling with more than one child, bring a book suitable to read to them both, or each child can play with a familiar item of interest. This might be a good time to give them a small snack.
- Take photos while waiting for the train/bus so the child can share the experience with a special person, and to help them to be prepared for the next time.

Safety

Write your mobile phone number on a tag and attach it to your child as an extra safety measure.

Holding hands is very important near traffic so practicing this skill beforehand will help. Play 'Ring a Ring a Rosie' or go on a short walk down the street where you work on hand holding. Some children struggle with this skill so you could discuss how to be safe with your therapist. (See Holding hands and going for a walk routine in this series).

If you are taking one child in a pram, be sure to strap them in securely. With two children, prepare your mobile child by talking about your expectations around holding your hand when getting on and off the bus, (see handout on this topic) and sitting quietly on the bus. A Social Story can be very useful to prepare for the trip, and it can be read while on the bus.

If you are travelling by train or ferry, be clear about where to stand while waiting and when it is safe to get on and off the transport.

Long-distance travel

- If you are making a long trip, be sure to take lots of food and drinks.
- Plan lots of activities – imaginative play animals, books, drawing materials, and pre download shows to watch on a phone or iPad.
- Pack an emergency change of clothes and wipes – just in case.
- Try sitting at the back of the bus or carriage where it is safe to do so. This will give your child more space to move.
- Take a throw that can double as a blanket or a pillow.
- Let the child know how long it will be by explaining the time with reference to concrete activities – we arrive after morning tea and lunch, or after we see the big bridge.
- Take movement breaks by walking along the train or visiting the bathroom on the bus.

Reducing car-based trips is a healthy choice in so many ways, and it is great to model this with your children.

Further Resources

Check out the links below for more information about how you can make the most out of shopping with your child:

- [Family travel & kids with additional needs | Raising Children Network](#)
- [Travel with kids: car, plane, bus & train | Raising Children Network](#)
- [Travelling with prams and young children | transportnsw.info](#)

Ask your Start Strong Pathways Educator to help with ideas for this routine. They can help with making visuals and making a plan.

Does your child have an Occupational Therapist? Let them know you are working on making travelling on public transport a more engaging time with your child. Check in with them about some calming strategies for your child or for other resources.

Does your child have a Speech Pathologist? They can help you with visuals as well as other resources to engage your child during trips.

References

- All About Street Signs, By David Nabors <https://www.amazon.com/All-About-Street-Signs-Stuff/dp/198573799X>
- The Picture Communication Symbols ©1981-2015 by Mayer-Johnson LLC a Tobii Dynavox company. All Rights Reserved Worldwide. Used with permission. Boardmaker® is a trademark of Mayer-Johnson LLC.