

FASD Informed Toolkit:



Holidays Abroad

Low-demand scripts for overseas travel, airports, passports, new cultures, language differences, lanyards, communication cards and gentle preparation

This Holidays Abroad section extends the same FASD-informed, low-demand approach into overseas travel. It supports adults to prepare children gently for passports, airports, flights, ferry travel, Eurotunnel journeys, coach trips, unfamiliar accommodation, different food, heat, language differences, time changes and public expectations. It also encourages discreet use of lanyards and FASD-informed communication cards so adults can reduce explanation demands in public places while protecting the child's dignity.

Core principles for a low-demand holiday abroad plan

- **Keep preparation small and concrete:** Use one picture, one object, one short phrase or one step at a time. Avoid building the holiday into a big emotional event too early.
- **Use travel documents as visual anchors:** A passport picture, boarding pass copy, airport photo, suitcase label or simple sequence can help the thinking brain understand what is coming.
- **Plan public explanations in advance:** A lanyard, wallet card or FASD-informed communication card can reduce the need to explain a child's needs repeatedly at airports, security, restaurants, attractions or hotels.
- **Protect dignity:** Adults can share information discreetly without speaking over the child, labelling them loudly or expecting them to perform coping in public.
- **Expect more recovery time:** Heat, travel delays, unfamiliar food, language differences, crowds and disrupted sleep can all increase brain demand.

1. Introducing the idea of going abroad

Going abroad can sound exciting, but it may also feel abstract, far away or unsafe to the child's thinking brain. Introduce the idea through concrete clues rather than lots of questions or emotional language.

Situation	Low-demand declarative language examples
A first gentle hint	"I have put one picture of the place in the holiday folder." "This map shows home here and the holiday country here." "The plan is just looking today."
Passport or travel document	"This little book helps people check who is travelling." "The passport has a safe job. It stays with the adult." "We can look, then put it away."
If the child worries about being far away	"Home is still home while we travel." "The photos and the plan help us know where we are." "Grown-ups are holding the big travel thinking."

2. Lanyards and FASD-informed communication cards

A lanyard or wallet communication card can help adults share essential information quickly and discreetly when travelling abroad. This can be especially useful at airport assistance desks, security, boarding gates, passport control, ferry terminals, Eurotunnel check-in, coach departure points, hotels, restaurants, excursions and attractions. The card should support access and understanding, not replace warm adult support.

It is important to contact the airport in advance wherever possible, as support services vary between airports and may need to be arranged before the day of travel. Many airports can discuss support for children and adults with additional needs, special assistance requirements or hidden disabilities. Adults may be able to ask about quieter routes, assistance desks, extra processing time, familiarisation visits, security support, boarding support or the discreet use of lanyards and communication cards. Where possible, it can help to request assistance through the airline, travel agent or tour operator at least 48 hours before travel, and to check the airport's own assisted travel or hidden disability information before the journey.

Airport support service	What this may include
Hidden disability or Sunflower lanyards	A discreet way to show staff that extra time, patience, clearer explanations or support may be needed.
Assistance or accessibility desks	A place to explain support needs quietly, ask what help is available that day, and confirm the next step.
Quieter routes or reduced-demand waiting spaces	Where available, these may reduce crowding, noise, queues, pressure and sensory overwhelm before security or boarding.
Support through check-in, security, passport control and boarding	Staff may be able to help with queues, transitions, instructions, document checks, bag drop, security trays, boarding gates, arrivals or baggage reclaim.
Extra processing time and visual guidance	Adults can ask staff to slow down, use short clear phrases, allow time before expecting a response, or point to the next step.
Familiarisation visits, airport guides or visual stories	Some airports offer preparation resources, familiarisation visits or “try before you fly” sessions so the journey feels less unknown.
Calmer or private security screening options	Where appropriate and available, adults may be able to ask about a calmer approach to screening, more explanation, or reduced public attention.
Sensory and communication support	Communication cards, sensory packs, fidget items, ear defenders, calm kits or staff awareness of non-visible disabilities may help reduce demand.
Priority or assisted boarding	Boarding earlier, later or with extra staff support may reduce pressure, rushing, crowding and last-minute instructions.
Queue support or reduced queuing where available	Staff may be able to advise on shorter waits, quieter queue points, assistance lanes or a planned place to wait nearby.

Support with unexpected delays or changes	Adults can ask staff for clearer updates, a quieter place to wait, help finding food, toilets or seating, and time to process the change.
Help finding toilets, seating, lifts or step-free routes	Clear directions, quieter routes, accessible toilets, lifts, seating points or staff escort may reduce searching and decision demand.
Support with mobility aids, medical equipment or essential items	Airports and airlines may need advance notice for wheelchairs, mobility aids, medication, medical devices, liquid medicines or essential comfort items.
Clear handover between airport, airline and assistance staff	A short explanation of what helps can support smoother transitions between check-in, assistance teams, cabin crew and arrival support.

Tips for communicating special needs at airports

[FASD-informed communication cards](#) can help adults explain support needs quickly, calmly and discreetly without putting the child under pressure or needing to repeat personal information in busy public spaces. The card can be shown at assistance desks, check-in, security, passport control, boarding gates, information desks, arrivals and baggage reclaim.

- **Prepare the card before travel:** include the child's key support needs, helpful phrases, or communication preferences, sensory needs and what staff can do to help.
- **Keep the wording short:** airport staff may only have a few seconds to read it, so use clear phrases such as "Please use short instructions", "Please allow extra processing time" or "Please speak to the adult first". Our communication card includes this and can be added to a lanyard if needed or tucked in your pocket to bring out at any time needed.
- **Use it early:** show the card before the child is overwhelmed, especially before check-in, security, passport control or boarding.
- **Protect dignity:** offer the card quietly rather than explaining loudly in front of the child, queues or other travellers.
- **Pair it with one spoken request:** for example, "This card explains what helps. We need short instructions and a little extra time."
- **Share what helps, not just the diagnosis:** staff are more likely to support well when they know the practical adjustment needed.
- **Keep copies in more than one place:** for example, one in a lanyard, one in the travel folder and one with another adult.

- **Use the same language with the child:** phrases on the card can match the adult's low-demand scripts, such as "One step at a time", "Adult will do the talking" or "Extra time helps my brain".

FASD-informed communication card wallet cards are available at <https://www.fasdinformed.co.uk/product-page/communications-card-wallet-card-i-have>

3. Airport, ferry, Eurotunnel, coach or overseas travel scripts

Travel moment	Declarative script examples
Leaving home	"The travel folder is packed." "Passports stay with the adult." "First car, then airport, then waiting."
Check-in or bag drop	"The suitcase is doing its travel job now." "We keep the small bag with us." "This part has queues and waiting."
Security	"This is the checking part." "Things go in the tray and come back after the machine." "I am helping your brain with one step at a time."
Boarding	"The gate is open." "Ticket, adult, seat." "Your job is keeping your body with me."
On the plane, ferry, Eurotunnel shuttle or coach	"This travel body moves and makes noises." "Your calm kit is in the bag." "Seatbelt, drink, quiet thing, rest." "On the ferry we can find a quieter edge." "In the Eurotunnel, the car stays still while the shuttle moves." "On the coach, our seat is the safe place until the next stop."
Arrival abroad	"This airport is different." "We are still with the same grown-ups." "First passports, then bags, then outside."

4. New country, new language, new sensory load

Being abroad can add invisible demands: unfamiliar signs, different smells, different food textures, heat, toilets, transport systems, money, accents and languages. The child may need adults to make the world smaller and more predictable.

Holiday-abroad demand	Supportive words
Different language	“People may use different words here.” “You do not need to answer quickly.” “The adult can do the talking.”
Heat, sun or tiredness	“Heat uses body energy.” “Shade, drink, hat, rest.” “We are choosing the cooler plan.”
Different food	“Food may look and smell different here.” “Safe food is part of the plan.” “Trying new food is not the job today.”
Different toilets or hygiene routines	“This toilet is different and the steps are the same.” “Adult waits near the door.” “Hands, bag, back to safe place.”

5. Printable mini sequence: holiday abroad

☐	Step	Low-demand words
☐	Holiday folder	“The abroad plan is in the folder.”
☐	Passport safe	“Passport has a safe adult job.”
☐	Travel place	“Airport, ferry port, Eurotunnel terminal, coach stop or station comes next.”
☐	Checking part	“People check bags and papers.”
☐	Travel body	“Seatbelt, drink, quiet thing.”
☐	Arrive abroad	“New country. Same grown-ups.”

Closing reminder

A successful holiday abroad is not measured by constant happiness, perfect flexibility, busy sightseeing, or how well a child copes with airports, ferries, Eurotunnel, coach trips, new food, heat, noise or unfamiliar places.

For an FASD brain, success may be safety, regulation, enough recovery time, supported memories, fewer demands, discreet communication tools, and adults who understand that difficulty with change is often “can’t yet” rather than “won’t”.

Our small lanyard-size communication cards are designed to give adults quick, discreet access to supportive FASD-informed words when children need calm, clear and low-demand communication.

For small lanyard-size communication cards, find our shop at <https://www.fasdinformed.co.uk/category/all-products>