

Four brothers learn how to compromise and travel together

Sarah Ziegel, who lives in London, has four sons with autism aged eight to 17. You might think that going anywhere together would be four times the aggravation for the family, but, surprisingly, Ziegel says this isn't the case.

"When we're going on an outing, we definitely have to choose somewhere they all want to go," she says. "They've all had to compro-

mise, which I think has been good for them."

The boys have all been following an ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis) programme for years. This approach, Ziegel maintains, has been instrumental in helping to make journeys of all kinds much smoother.

"For example, one of the boys would only sit on the back seat of the bus," she says. "Obviously, this wasn't always possible. To get over this, we arranged for him to go on a bus with a carer to somewhere he really wanted to go. If the seat was occupied and he screamed, they got off. They got on the next bus and if he screamed again, they got off again. He learned quickly that he had to stop screaming to get to his destination."

Giving children a reason to make a journey is a useful tool, Ziegel believes. One of her



Out together: Sarah Ziegel's sons have learned to co-operate

older boys is learning to travel by himself on public transport to his running club. "He loves running, so he wants to go to the club," she says. "If he was going to the dentist, I'm not sure he would be so keen!"

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Sarah Ziegel: ABA has been 'instrumental' in sons' travel

on and they were joined by a driver. After that, the bus drove the students twice round the block. The aim is to eventually get them making a journey on a working bus with other members of the public.

"The students have really enjoyed it," Rhoden says. "It's given them a real sense of achievement. TfL have been amazingly helpful. They've even offered to send over random members of staff to pretend to be passengers on the bus!"


Another organisation that helps individuals with autism to travel independently is Tracscare. This is a private company offering supported living to people across the UK with learning difficulties,

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brain injuries, mental health issues or autism. With its scheme, each autistic client has their route to college or voluntary work planned for them. This could be on foot or public transport and takes into account any anxieties such as a

fear of dogs. Students are escorted at first, carrying smart phones for tracking or for following a map. They are also encouraged to hold something, such as keys or a pebble, to focus their attention and relieve stress.

Days or weeks later, they make the journey with a carer following from a safe distance. Finally, when they are confident with the route, the person makes the journey alone.

"There can be a difference between the theory and practice of making a journey," a spokesperson comments, "but we received excellent feedback when we piloted the scheme in Wales. A couple of the clients can now travel by themselves." 

Contacts

- See the National Autistic Society website at www.autism.org.uk for travel tips and more information about the Autism Friendly Awards.
- Tracscare: www.tracscare.co.uk
- Transport for London can supply a travel mentor to accompany passengers for their first few times on a particular route. Visit: www.tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility

- Ambitious About Autism: www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- Gatwick Airport's disability provision: www.gatwickairport.com/at-the-airport/passenger-services/special-assistance/other-assistance
- Manchester Airport's disability provision: www.manchesterairport.co.uk/at-the-airport/special-assistance/autism-awareness

Further reading



A Parent's Guide to Coping with Autism by Sarah Ziegel, Hale Books, available from Waterstones bookshops or Amazon at £14.99/\$5.51 (special offer).