

# Independent Travel



A guide for parents,  
guardians and carers



Salvesen Mindroom Centre  
No Mind Left Behind

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Salvesen Mindroom Centre is a Scottish charity that supports, informs and empowers children and young people living with learning difficulties. Our vision is to become an internationally recognised centre of excellence in neurodiversity to help create a world in which no mind is left behind. To learn more about us please visit [www.mindroom.org](http://www.mindroom.org) or ask for copies of our literature.

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## About this guide

Neurodivergent children and young people tell us that they want to be able to travel independently so that they can do the things they enjoy, such as visiting relatives, spending time with their friends and going to places they like to be. Doing things such as travelling to places we want to be for ourselves is good for our self-esteem and helps to build our confidence in other areas of our lives. When we asked neurodivergent children and young people how adults could help them to become more independent at travelling they generally said things like *'just show us how to do it!'*. We hope this guide will support you to do just that!

You will find QR codes throughout our resource which you can use to get further information. If you're reading this on a computer or mobile device then just click the QR code rather than scanning it.

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## Getting started...

Confidence is really important when it comes to independent travel. A good way of helping to build anyone's confidence is to show that you have confidence in them. It is understandable for parents and carers to be anxious about their child travelling independently. We know it is easier said than done, however try to be conscious of not passing on your own worries about this. This guide begins with tips that we hope will help you to manage your own feelings about your child beginning to travel independently.

- Start early with travel training so that you and your child both build up to them becoming more independent gradually. Even at a very young age you can discuss how you're going to get to the places that you want to go and involve them in thinking about and planning journeys.
- Take real opportunities to help them develop their skills so that travelling independently becomes a natural part of regular life and not a stressful addition to things that you feel you need to do.
- Helping your child to be organised so that they have everything they need for a journey will help you to both feel less anxious about journeys they make independently. We will go into more detail about this later.
- Building your child's confidence in dealing with problems in other areas of their life, will help them to problem solve when they start to travel independently. It will also help you to worry less.
- Make sure that your child has a way of contacting you or getting help if they need it. Try to avoid checking up on them, as this can help to build their confidence.
- Congratulating your child on successfully managing a journey, or any part of the process in planning and making one, will help to build their confidence and as a result will help you to feel less anxious about them making journeys independently.

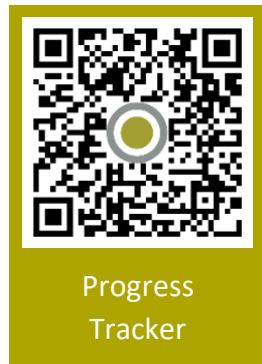


There will be times when things go wrong and your child finds it difficult. Remember that this is only to be expected – nobody has gone through life without any hiccups! It's important to allow your child to make their own mistakes, in the same way that you have yourself, and be there to support them afterwards.

## Tips for before journey

### How can I help my child to start thinking about planning or making their own journey?

- Encourage them to think about places they want to go to or people they would like to see. This can be a helpful starting point to find things that will motivate them towards increasing their independence.
- Have a chat with your child about the different stages and aspects involved in a journey to identify what they can already do themselves, and if there are any steps they will need help with. You can find examples of some of the individual steps to consider here:



- Depending on which stage your child is at, you may need to support them to plan the different stages of a journey. As your child becomes more independent with their travelling, it is important to ensure they always make a clear plan for each journey they make.



- When your child first starts practising a journey, they might want to do so when it is quieter. However, if a specific journey would usually be during a busy time, such as getting to college or a work placement, we recommend practising the journey at the same time of day once they have built up their confidence.
- Reassure your child that it can often take time to build up their confidence and skills, and this will happen at a different pace for every child.
- Your child might want to think about a sunflower lanyard
- There are lots of things we cannot control! It can be a good idea to think about the things we can control to help feel organised before a journey. You could help your child to organise practical things such as:
  - Ensure their phone is charged, if they use one
  - Have important contacts saved or written down
  - Spare cash/coins
  - Anything that helps to distract or help them to feel calm e.g., headphones for listening to music, games, fidgets
  - Prepare communication cards in advance showing where they want to go, so they can show these to a bus, train, or taxi driver
  - If your child is not able to verbalise how they are feeling or where they want to go, for whatever reason, having a pen and paper to hand can be helpful if they want to note down or draw to communicate with others
  - If using a bus or train, take a note of the numbers and times they are aiming for, and approximate journey time
- If using public transport, encourage your child to think about where they would like to sit, and what they could do if it is not available.
- If/when your child is travelling on their own, encourage them to let somebody/people they trust know where they are going and when they expect to be at their destination.



Hidden  
Disabilities Store

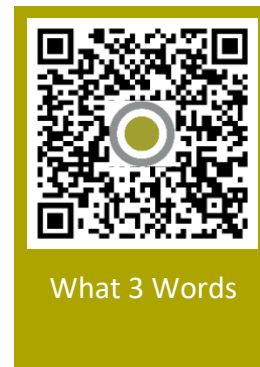
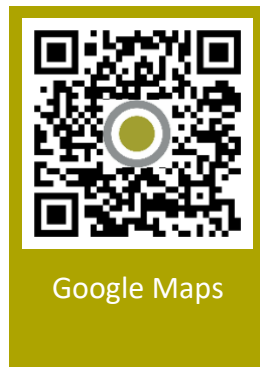


- Discuss scenarios that could happen such as bus changing usual route, or not arriving, or train cancelled, or pathway closed. Support your child to come up with some ideas about how they could adapt their plan, to make sure they get to somewhere safe, it might not be the place they had planned to go! But that is okay. Remember, everybody's solutions will be unique to them.

## Tips for during journey

### How can I help my child to feel safe and confident during a journey?

- Encourage them to keep track of where they are on their journey. They can look out for landmarks or use technology. Parents and carers have told us the following have been useful:



- Your child might find that having a planned check in moment is helpful. This might be a mid-way point, or several, depending on the length of the journey and how the individual child feels. If they have a phone, they could phone or message a friend or family member halfway through their journey. They could do so at another significant point of their journey such as changing transport method. For example, from train to bus, or one bus to another.
- Grounding or self-regulation techniques can be useful throughout a journey, especially if it is a new one, and not just when beginning to feel overwhelmed.





- If it is a longer journey, and your child benefits from movement breaks, think about safe ways to do so, depending on the type of transport. It could be tapping feet or sitting on their hands and moving side to side.



- Unexpected things can happen during an actual journey such as hearing loud noises or voices, encountering different groups and types of people. Or the actual route might change unexpectedly. If your child feels that they are becoming more anxious encourage them to think back to their planning. Encourage them to let a trusted adult know if they think it will help.

## Tips for after journey

### Is there anything I can do to help my child after a journey?

- Praise them and acknowledge their progress.
- Encourage your child to keep a log of journeys made to look back on, this might include reflections on:
  - How did they feel?
  - How did you feel?
  - What did they do to help them feel safe and comfortable?
  - What went well?
  - Did anything not go so well? And how did they respond? What did you learn?
  - What would you like your next steps to be?





- Encourage your child to use their reflections to help them plan for future journeys.



Together  
Shadow Meet

It can be helpful to think of three general stages when you are working with your child to develop independent travel skills:

- **Together** - Travelling with your child
- **Shadow** - Being close by when they are travelling
- **Meet** - Joining them at the end of the journey

### Is it true that children and young people get free bus travel in Scotland?

- In Scotland all children and young people (aged 5-21) are entitled to a free National Entitlement Card (NEC) which means free bus travel all over Scotland. If a child or young person is 5-15 their parent/guardian submits their application, if they are 16-21 they submit the application themselves for the Young Persons Travel Scheme (YPTS)



Free Bus  
Scotland

### What about other types of public transport or if my child needs somebody to travel with them?

- If your child or young person has a disability, they are entitled to apply for a Young Disabled Persons (YDP) National Entitlement Card (NEC).



