

Advice and Tips for our Return to the Community

With case numbers going down, and more people getting vaccinated, things are beginning to open back up again. It has been a long time since barbers, hairdressers, restaurants etc. have been open. Returning to these places can seem quite daunting for anyone.

To help you and your family with this return to the community we have compiled a list of tips.

1. Plan

Managing expectations and preparing your child is a key way to help them get used to a potential disruption of routine. When planning to return to normal, make sure your child knows when these outings are scheduled. When an appointment is made to go to the hairdresser or a table is booked to go to a restaurant, write it on a calendar visible to your child. Seeing when it is scheduled will help them to know what to expect and perhaps even get excited about the prospect of doing things that they have not been able to do for a while. For more information on Routines and their importance, click [here](#).

2. Choose somewhere familiar

Re-entering into normal life is daunting already without having to tackle a completely new environment. By choosing somewhere that is already familiar to you and your child it is much easier for them to prepare themselves and to feel comfortable when they get there.

3. Start small

Instead of going to a restaurant straight away, perhaps choose a local cafe, and simply get drinks and a treat. After having spent so much time with the same people, it can be unnerving to suddenly be amongst many strangers at once. By going somewhere smaller and for a shorter period of time, it will be much easier to work up to going to a restaurant as the fear of being around so many strangers should be lessened.

4. Choose timings wisely

Arrange to go to the hairdresser/barbershop/restaurant etc at a typically quiet time. Much like the other tips, going at a quieter time will help reduce auditory stimulation that may be overwhelming. It will also give your child a chance to get used to the outside world more gradually and therefore reduce stress and anxieties.

5. Explain changes

If things are likely to look different, explain that to your child. If dining is only outdoors for example or colouring sheets are not available, those may be things that will upset your child. Have a chat about what the experience may be like and what might be different and what might be the same. Asking your child what they are looking forward to might give an idea of what they are expecting and allow you to manage those expectations.

We have also created some social stories to help with conversations returning to specific activities in the community

Click [here](#) for “Going back to the hairdresser’s”

Click [here](#) for “Going out to a restaurant” or [here](#) for “Outdoor restaurants”

Click [here](#) for “Getting public transport again”

Click [here](#) for “Visiting granny and grandad”

Click [here](#) for “Going to the shoe shop”

For more resources, tips, and advice, visit us at autism-toolkit.ie