



Disability Dispatch

Your Source for Social Security News
from the Law Office of Cathy L. Brackin

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Tips for Traveling with Special Needs Kids

School will soon be out and, before you know it, it will be time for the family vacation. Whether you're off to Florida to see the Mouse or just visiting Grandmom in another state, traveling with special needs children can be a challenge. Here are a few tips to help you plan a trip that will be fun for the entire family.



Where to go

Choosing the right destination is key. Is there a support group for your child's disability? If you start there you can network with other parents for suggestions. There are vacations geared to particular disabilities. Travel agent **Susette Whitfield** told me about **Autism on the Seas**, an organization that offers cruises and land resort options not only for those with autism, but also those with Asperger's and other developmental disabilities. They have their own staff and group activities. **Morgan's Wonderland** in San Antonio, Texas, is a theme park specially designed for those with cognitive or physical disabilities. **Disney World** offers a Guest Assistance Card. Bring a doctor's note describing your child's issues and take it to Guest Services. Although the card doesn't permit you to jump the line, you can use an alternate entrance to the attractions.



Planning and packing

Before leaving home, research what resources or services are available at your destination. Some tourist spots may have strollers for big kids, for example. Perhaps having a kitchenette would be helpful if your child has difficulty with restaurants or has special dietary needs. Call ahead and let staff know what you need for your child. Bring familiar items from home such as pillows, blankets, toys and books. Pack medications in their original containers and store them in

your carry-on if flying. Google the nearest pharmacy and hospital in case of emergency. For peace of mind, consider purchasing travel insurance.



Getting there

When going through airport security, TSA recommends that you inform the security officer if your child has any special needs or medical devices. Tell them if you think your child may become upset during the screening process. If a private screening is required, you should remain with your child. If traveling by car, plan for frequent rest stops. Have plenty of snacks and entertainment. A small surprise gift can help during a cranky spell.



Having a great time

Less is more. Don't try to cram in too much activity in one day. Allow time to just "chill." Special needs kids often have difficulty adapting to changes in their routine. Prepare your child by explaining each day what is going to happen. Try to maintain a routine as much as possible with regard to sleeping and eating.

So, plan well, keep expectations realistic, and have a great vacation!

For more information about vacations for special needs children, call Susette Whitfield of **Cruise Outlets & Travel** in Woodbury, NJ, 856-853-9515. ✨

EARNINGS STATEMENTS ARE BACK

Your Social Security earnings statement can now be obtained online. About one year ago the Social Security Administration stopped mailing the statements due to costs. Fortunately, privacy concerns have been resolved. Log on to www.ssa.gov/mystatement and set up an account. The statements enable workers to make sure they are receiving credit for proper earnings, and they show estimated benefits. ✨

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Enabled Gardening Can Grow On You

According to a German proverb, "The garden is the poor man's apothecary." Studies show that gardening can improve the body, mind and spirit. Unfortunately, many of my clients give up this hobby because of their disabilities.

Horticultural therapist **Jeannette Morrissey** of **McGee Rehabilitation** offers several tips on how to make gardening easier. She suggests beginning with something easy such as window boxes. Another idea is planting in light pots placed on tables.

Raised beds can reduce the need to bend or kneel. **Home Depot** and **Lowe's** sell raised bed kits. Almost anything can be planted in containers, but don't overcrowd the plants. There should be about 6-12 inches of soil in a container. Herbs such as thyme and cilantro



are easy to grow from seeds.

Lightweight tools with large handles can be helpful if you have arthritis or limited strength. **ArthritisSupplies.com** sells "Easi-Grip" tools with ergonomically angled handles. They also sell long reach cultivators, trowels and hoes, which allow gardening from a seated position. For those with cognitive difficulties, the tasks need to be broken down step by step. Checking on the plants daily and giving needed care can improve the gardener's mental function.

Gardening is therapeutic, and cheerful flowers will brighten any environment. So don't stop — just change the way you garden. ✿

CASE STUDY: BACK PAIN STALLS SALES MANAGER

Forty-six-year-old **Jeffrey** (name changed to protect privacy) was an automobile sales manager for 18 years. He prided himself as an athlete, kept himself in excellent shape and enjoyed coaching football. After a mountain biking trip Jeffrey developed back pain, which progressed to the point where his doctor took him out of work. MRIs revealed herniated discs at two levels in the lumbar spine. Treatment included medication, physical therapy, and epidural steroid injections. Recommended surgery could not be undertaken due to insurance issues.

Jeffrey's claim for Social Security Disability was denied, as was his appeal. Eventually, the case made its way to the hearing level. I obtained an opinion from Jeffrey's treating physician as to his physical limitations. He could carry less than 10 pounds occasionally, walk or stand less than 2 hours, and sit less than 2 hours in an 8-hour day. According to his doctor, he would need at least 5 unscheduled breaks lasting 25 minutes, and he was likely to be absent more than 4 days a month.

The loss of his active lifestyle was devastating. Family members described how Jeffrey's positive attitude changed to irritability.

At the conclusion of the hearing the judge found Jeffrey to be disabled and granted 32 months of retroactive benefits. ✿



Disability Dispatch is published by the Law Office of Cathy L. Brackin. It is not intended to give legal advice. You should consult an attorney for advice regarding your individual situation.

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