

Returning to Community Activities After a Year of Pandemic Precautions

TIPS FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Process

- When you think about returning to community activities after a year of pandemic precautions, it is normal to feel different emotions, such as nervous, afraid, excited, or stressed. It can help to talk, write, or draw about these feelings. Social narratives and visual supports can help people understand and share how they feel.
- It can help to break down an activity into smaller steps. For example, some people might choose an outside activity or to do an activity for a short time.
- If you are worried, you can try to focus on things you can do to keep yourself safe, like wearing a mask, washing hands, and social distancing, even if those guidelines are not required.

Prepare

- Try to follow safety guidelines. Please check the CDC website for the most updated information.
- Look for information from the place you will be visiting to see how they are keeping visitors safe. Remember that there might be changes to rules since the last time you did this activity. For example, are you able to visit any time during the hours of operation or will you need to make reservations before you go? Is curbside pickup an option for something now that wasn't before?
- If there are optional guidelines, decide before you go which you will follow. For instance, can you identify locations that will be less crowded or times that will be less busy? Think about what coping and calming strategies can be used during the activity if needed. For example, you might take some deep breaths or take a break in a quiet place.

Practice

- Think of skills you may not have used during the pandemic or new skills you may need to practice before the activity. These might include things like what to do if someone is not following the guidelines, how to respond when someone asks you to follow a rule, or how to ask for help, a break, or to leave early. Begin with easier tasks and work up to harder ones.
- Practice for short amounts of time, during calm times of the day, and in a comfortable setting. Tools like social narratives, videos of the outing/location, role playing, and a visual schedule may help.
- Make sure you are appreciating yourself by trying to follow practice with something you enjoy!

Proceed

- Bring the supports you used during practice with you to help connect the practice to the real-life outing.
- Keep your first outings short and simple.
- Balance outings and new experiences with time at home or other comfortable settings before and/or after the activity.

Pause

- After the outing, think about what went well and write it down. Take a few minutes to appreciate what went well!
- You can also think about what you want to do differently the next time.

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center program dedicated to improve assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorder and their families while advancing knowledge and training. triad.vumc.org

