

Eating Out, My Way

A friendly, flexible guide for autistic children
and the grown-ups who support them



PLAN TOGETHER

My needs matter

CHOOSE MY WAY

My needs matter

PAUSE OR LEAVE

My needs matter

This guide is for you.

Going to a cafe or restaurant can mean new smells, sounds, menus and waiting. You can look at these pages, draw, point or ask someone to read with you. You can skip any part. You do not have to taste, finish or eat a particular food to have a successful visit.

Before we go

A little planning can make a cafe visit feel more predictable.



Tell me what to expect

Show me where we are going, who is coming, how we will get there and what might happen. A photo, simple menu or picture sequence may help me.

Bring what helps me

I might bring ear defenders, a comfort item, a familiar activity, a drink or food that feels safe, if the venue allows it.

Plan for surprises

Agree what we can do if it is busy, the table is not ready, an item is unavailable or I want to leave early.

What would I like to know before we go?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Where are we going? | ☐ How long might we stay? |
| ☐ What food might be available? | ☐ Can we choose a quieter seat? |
| ☐ Can I bring a familiar food? | ☐ How will we leave if needed? |

Something I want my grown-up to know:

MY PLAN

My cafe plan

Fill this in together, draw it or add pictures.

The plan belongs to me too

My grown-up can explain the plan and listen to what I need. It is okay to change the plan, choose a shorter visit or decide today is not the right day.

We are going to:

I am going with:

We will travel by:

We can leave when:

My visit in four steps

FIRST

Get ready

NEXT

Travel there

THEN

Choose a seat

LAST

Leave and rest

My pause or finished signal is:

My grown-up can help

My grown-up can check the plan, help with ordering and speak up about food safety or other needs.

One thing I want to ask for:

Arriving and choosing

I can choose a place that feels as comfortable as possible.



When we arrive

My grown-up can explain where we are going and what happens next. I can look around before choosing a seat if that helps.

My seat matters

I might prefer a quieter corner, space from speakers, a seat near the exit or a place where I can sit beside my grown-up.

Waiting can change

The table or food may take longer than planned. My grown-up can tell me what is happening and show me what comes next.

What could help me while we are there?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Know where the toilets are | ☐ Use headphones or a fidget |
| ☐ Have a simple waiting activity | ☐ See the menu before ordering |
| ☐ Have space to move if safe | ☐ Know our leaving plan |

I can ask for time

I do not have to choose straight away. My grown-up can help ask for a moment or explain the choices in a simple way.

Food and my choices

Food preferences and sensory needs deserve respect.



I choose what I can manage

I can choose a familiar item, eat only what feels manageable, or not eat during this visit. I do not have to taste, lick, finish or explain my choice.

Things my grown-up can plan for:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ A familiar food or drink | ☐ A food texture I prefer |
| ☐ Food smells or nearby dishes | ☐ Separate items on a plate |
| ☐ A smaller or plain option | ☐ A safe snack if allowed |
| ☐ A break from the table | ☐ No comments about how much I eat |

Food safety is adult work

My grown-up checks ingredients, allergies, cross-contact risks and venue rules. I do not have to work this out alone.

Familiar food can help

If bringing food would help, my grown-up can check with the venue first. My food needs are not bad manners.

What food or eating support would help me:

Ordering and waiting

I can take part by speaking, pointing or letting my grown-up help.



I can communicate in my own way

I might speak, point to a menu picture, use AAC, sign, write, gesture or ask my grown-up to order for me. I do not have to make eye contact or speak to the server.

I can ask or show...

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I need more time | ☐ Please show me a picture |
| ☐ I want the same as usual | ☐ Can my grown-up order? |
| ☐ I need a break | ☐ That is not what I chose |
| ☐ Please keep items separate | ☐ I am finished |

If my choice is not available

My grown-up can tell me clearly and offer one or two alternatives, including leaving or choosing something familiar. I do not have to pick quickly.

While we wait

I might use a quiet activity, look at the menu, move to a calmer place with my grown-up or change the plan.

If I need a break

I can tell my grown-up when it feels like too much.



My signal can be words or actions

I can say or show PAUSE, HELP or FINISHED. I can point to a picture, use AAC, gesture, move closer to my grown-up or communicate another way.

My grown-up can help by...

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Using fewer words | ☐ Giving me time |
| ☐ Finding a quieter place | ☐ Offering one clear choice |
| ☐ Helping me leave safely | ☐ Not asking me to keep eating |

Helpful grown-up words

"We can pause." "Would you like the quiet place or to go home?" "You can show me." Then wait and listen.

Please remember

Do not pressure me to taste food, finish a meal or stay to prove I can cope. A short visit or leaving early can be the right plan.

After the visit

I can take time to recover before talking about what happened.



Afterwards can be part of the plan

I might need quiet, less talking, a familiar activity or time with my comfort item. My grown-up can remind me of any next steps when I am ready.

Something that felt okay for me:

Something I would like to change next time:

A note for grown-ups

Keep food choices pressure-free. If the child has allergies, intolerances or a medical eating plan, check ingredients and the venue arrangements in advance. Choose a shorter visit or leave if the child needs to.

A good visit is one where the child feels listened to and supported.