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Access to Air Travel – for passengers with a disability or reduced mobility

Case study – travelling with a child with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

My name is Julia Patterson. My son, Christian, is aged 8 and has ASD, ADHD and dyspraxia. Travelling by air with Christian is always challenging although he does enjoy the experience.

The main issue for us when travelling is queues, especially around security. Christian doesn't understand why he has to queue; also he often gets over stimulated by the noise around the airport and loud, unexpected public announcements. This makes it very hard to get him to stay with us and much of my time is spent trying to restrain a child who wants to bolt, while trying to proceed through the security screening.

In the past I was not aware that we could avail of the special assistance services that are offered by airports and airlines. Christian has a hidden disability that is often not apparent to staff and other passengers. However, since learning that we could request assistance having the extra pair of hands has been a huge help.

After booking the special assistance with the airline in advance, when we arrive at the airport we go straight to the special assistance desk. There we are assigned a member of staff to assist Christian. They help us with checking in our bags and fast track us through security so queuing isn't a big issue anymore. Christian doesn't follow instructions well but the airport staff are patient with him and work with us to get him to slowly walk through the scanners.

The assistance staff member takes us to the food court and shopping area and leaves us there until our flight is ready to board, then they will return and escort us onto the aeroplane. The airline are accommodating when assigning us appropriate seats. Once on-board staff approach us to ensure we are ok.





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While we've had very positive experiences using the special assistance services when flying from Northern Ireland airports we have found that sometimes there is not the same level of service at other European airports, even when flying with the same airline. I recognise the importance of raising the issue with the airline or airport in these instances to ensure that it is addressed and the service is improved.

I would encourage anyone who needs special assistance when travelling to request it when booking their flight. The extra assistance has been a huge help to our family when travelling by air.

What you need to know

All airports and airlines in the European Union are required to provide assistance to passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. All types of disabilities are covered including hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities, autism and hearing loss. A passenger may have reduced mobility because of their age, an illness or a temporary injury, for example a broken arm or leg.

1. You are entitled to assistance at all stages of your journey, right from the point of booking your ticket;
2. The special assistance must be provided free of charge; and
3. You should request assistance at least 48 hours before you travel to ensure all assistance needed, including any relevant equipment, is available.

Types of special assistance include:

- Assistance from when you arrive at the airport. Assistance points are available at arrival areas including terminal entrances, car parks, bus and rail stops;
- Help with checking-in;
- Passengers can request for security screening to be carried out in a private area out of view of other passengers;
- Help getting around the airport, accessing the toilet facilities, to getting to a seating area and to the departure gate;





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- Assistance staff may be able to help you access shops or restaurants but are not required to wait while you shop or eat a meal.
- Help boarding the plane, on-board the plane, disembarking; and
- At your destination airport – help to retrieve your baggage, through immigration and custom procedures and to a designated point such as the airport car park, airport train or bus station or a connecting flight.

Travelling with an assistance dog

Your assistance dog can travel in the cabin with you. Make sure you have the necessary paperwork to identify your dog as a trained assistance dog. (Before you travel check with the airline about the specific documents required for this.)

If you are travelling outside the UK you should contact the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) for information on what steps you must take before travelling email: tradeadminpost@dardni.gov.uk or telephone 028 9052 4622.

What if things go wrong?

If you are dissatisfied with the service provided you should contact the airline or airport terminal. If you remain dissatisfied with the response or if you do not feel comfortable raising the complaint with the service provider yourself, you can contact the Consumer Council in the first instance. We have the power to investigate the matter on your behalf.

Further advice and information

Some airports will allow you to visit the airport before you travel to familiarise you with the building and its noises. Some also have videos or interactive guides on their websites that you can view before you travel.





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Airport website information and special assistance contact details:

George Best Belfast City Airport -

www.belfastcityairport.com/At-The-Airport/Passenger-Information/travelling-with-children

Telephone - 02890 935247

Email - prm@belfastcityairport.com

Belfast International Airport –

<http://www.belfastairport.com/special-assistance/autism-awareness>

Telephone - 028 9448 4957

Email - ocs@bfs.aero

City of Derry Airport

<https://www.cityofderryairport.com/airport-information/specialassistance>

Telephone - 028 71810784 extension: 201

Email - info@cityofderryairport.com

Dublin Airport

www.dublinairport.com/Libraries/Autism/Visual_guide_to_planning_your_journey_for_people_with_Autism_T2.sflb.ashx

Telephone - + **353 1 944 0341**

Autism NI

Autism NI has produced a factsheet that has some general information on travelling with individuals with autism which can be accessed at this link

www.autismni.org/holidays--autism.html

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More detailed information can be found in the Consumer Council's Access to Air Travel guide (including easy read and audio formats) available online:

www.consumercouncil.org.uk/transport/access-to-air-and-sea/

or

You can contact the **Consumer Council** on 0800 121 6022 or complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk

