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Aer Lingus, Kinney Center for Autism Education and Support collaborate to develop visual guide for air travel

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Aer Lingus and the Kinney Center for Autism Education and Support at Saint Joseph's University have partnered to develop a visual guide that helps individuals with autism and related disorders prepare for and experience air travel. The guide, believed to be the first of its kind offered by an airline, is now available for families and caretakers to access via Aerlingus.com's Travel Information/Traveling with Children section.

"Aer Lingus is proud to offer this proactive resource that allows families and caretakers who fly with our airline to narrate and prepare for travel scenarios that could be challenging for individuals with autism," says Jack Foley, vice president for Aer Lingus North America. "We are grateful to our partners at the Kinney Center for Autism Education and Support for giving us this opportunity to respond to the needs of this population and for providing this essential support to our guests."

The resource chronicles the entire air travel experience in color photographs captioned in first-person language, and is divided into three parts: pre-flight, on board, and post-flight.

"It is our hope that this resource will help individuals with autism and related disorders prepare for and experience successful travel to new and exciting places," says Foley.

Ryan Hammond, executive director of the Kinney Center, says each guide was produced by Kinney Center Board Certified Behavior Analysts and Aer Lingus, with the cooperation of John F. Kennedy International Airport Terminal 5 and the Transportation Security Administration.

"These three visual guides were developed in response to the needs of families and others who face the potentially daunting task of accompanying an individual with autism through airports and onto airplanes, which may be novel experiences in unknown environments," Hammond says. "This project

helps create a shift from awareness of a challenge, to action, providing resources that will support the autism community."

According to Hammond, the individual guides should be viewed prior to travel to help address experiences that could provoke anxiety. "Working with the guides will help travelers with autism to practice strategies and prepare for the unexpected," she says.

In addition, Hammond says the resource gives parents and caregivers unprecedented access to visuals that wouldn't normally be available, given today's security standards. "Providing actual images to support content that portrays aspects of air travel like entering the body scanner, following security protocols and the overall environment, allows better preparation for the unknown, a challenge for individuals with autism," she says.

Deanna Segrave-Daly, of Radnor, Pennsylvania, a frequent traveler whose daughter was diagnosed with autism at age two and one-half, says the guides address scenarios that she hadn't imagined when she wrote her own narrative to help facilitate travel with her daughter.

"I'm grateful that Aer Lingus and the Kinney Center have dedicated time and resources to making travel as comfortable as possible for the autism community," says Segrave-Daly.

Source:

Saint Joseph's University
