



Planes, Trains and Automobiles!

Traveling has always been difficult for us. It is hard to explain to the outside world that when they are looking at our beautiful daughter who appears, dare I say typical on the outside, they need to dig deeper because she has an invisible disability. In the beginning when we traveled I was always explaining AUTISM to the flight attendant, TSA security, desk assistants, conductors, Taxi-Uber drivers. It was exasperating!



I recall on one occasion at the curb check-in an attendant attempted to refuse to allow our daughter to board with me. Admittedly she looked older and quite frankly old enough to have an ID but she did not have one. She was only 14! The attendant said - MAM - you could be stealing this child. Now you have to understand this is a difficult situation. Our daughter depending on the time, environment, surroundings and a plethora of other "X" factors may not respond - or at least not promptly. I had to rely on every advocacy skill to get her through.

No more! After that we enrolled our daughter in Drivers Education. She obtained a permit and ultimately her license. BUT what happens when an autistic person does not have all of that? It appears Tampa International Airport finally has a solution, ("TPA") modeled a program in the United Kingdom that

allows support staff to understand travelers with invisible disabilities. The concept is simple. TPA provides Sunflower Lanyards to this population to use through their entire travel experience. The lanyards let the public know that they are engaging with someone who has other sensory needs.

Simple and Brilliant!



“The sunflower lanyards are available on level 3 of the main terminal at the information kiosk near Starbucks. They are completely free – no questions asked.”

[Learn More About This Program](#)

Although the lanyards do not resolve every solution related to planes, trains and automobiles it is a start!

It is About Time!

Before I begin, I realize this is an abundance of information and will certainly create overload, but as parents, family members, friends, caregivers and loved ones, we need to know how to **PROPERLY** advocate for those we love. This means the more knowledge we have, the more effective we are as advocates.

The general complaints I receive from families like mine include:

- **My child is not being treated right,**
- **My child is not included,**
- **My child is "overly" disciplined, and**
- **My child is not given grace.**

The stories range from my child was isolated or removed from the classroom, because their demeanor was "disruptive and impulsive" to my child was "accused" of acting in a threatening manner by simply speaking out of turn. To be clear, many of the issues could be resolved with simply good training. Our school system should support all parents, students and those who educate them on what is and is not appropriate under [IDEA](#).

Until there is uniformity in the classrooms, we should share as many resources as possible to educate each other on appropriate terminology and best practices under federal law to support children who need "extra" assistance without "exhaustive" judgment.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services surveyed parents on their experiences with schools and disciplinary actions. I will not bore you with the data but let's just say it is not good. The data in sum, confirms what we should all acknowledge, which is children with intellectual disabilities are disproportionately disciplined. Further,

many educators, while well meaning, do not firmly understand the processes to rehabilitate children in accordance with federal law. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona explained,

“It provides clarity around this too. That we don't have to choose between protecting students' rights and giving schools the tools to identify and deliver safe, appropriate interventions,”

[Read all About it](#)

The Education Department this month released detailed advice in the Questions and Answers: Addressing the Needs of Children with Disabilities and IDEA's Discipline Provisions. The document is voluminous, BUT if you scroll to the end of it you will find important definitions that caregivers should be aware of.

[Explore the Document \(page 53-57\)](#)

The Education Department also noted information on proactive approaches that positively impact the lives of our children. My best advice is MAKE the time to arm yourself with the information you need in REAL time.

[Explore The Guide](#)

It is About TIME!

There is Room for Everyone!



Ben Raanan is a disabled director, educator, and advocate from Chicago, Illinois. Much of his artistic focus is centralized around telling honest stories about those with disabilities and mental illness.

[Read All About Ben](#)

My family and I are always on a hunt for theater opportunities. We are a HUGE theater family and love supporting the arts.

My husband is on the board of

I am a board member of
[SPAA, the St. Petersburg Arts Alliance](#)
[On the St. Petersburg Public Arts Commission](#)

and we are long-time supporters of
[WBTT](#)
[Studio 620](#) and
[American Stage](#)

So when I learned about the [Chicago Children Theater](#), my husband and I were well- GRATEFUL! The program is for and specifically created for INCLUSIVITY. Refreshing concept. The director, Ben Raanan, a disabled person, focuses on persons with disabilities or mental illness. Chicago Children's Theatre was recognized for its unique space in theater and educational programs.

Whether we like it or not, our daughter with ASD is determined to follow our older daughter's footsteps and leave the nest. She recently embarked on tours to schools solely focused on the ARTS! Both Chicago and Atlanta are big contenders. I think we took it for granted that St. Petersburg would be her only consideration, after all we have an incredible art city with neighboring partners. But realizing we have NO CONTROL and learning that other cities care about arts and INCLUSION at all levels, gives us assurance that regardless where she lands there will be a community ready to support and accept our daughter for who she is- AS she is. There is ROOM for everyone and that is why WE love the ARTS!.

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