

Big Days Out

A Sensory Buffering Guide for Parents

THE CORE IDEA

You're not just managing an event, you're actively creating buffer space and buffer time around your child throughout the day. This idea borrows from something Kaelynn Partlow, an autistic advocate and star of Love on the Spectrum, calls **"crowd buffering"** — using planning and personal space to protect against sensory overload before it happens, rather than reacting once it does.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO BUFFER A BIG DAY OUT

1 Arrive early, before the crowds build.

Getting there ahead of the rush means your child gets to settle into the space and the noise level gradually, rather than being dropped into it at its most overwhelming.

2 Cap your time.

Two to three hours at a big event is often the useful limit before overload sets in. Plan to leave at that point, even if the event is still going, rather than pushing until things go wrong.

3 Pack familiar food.

Bringing food you know your child likes and trusts removes one whole area of unpredictability from the day. Bento boxes or similar make this easy to prepare the night before.

4 Build in quiet decompression time.

After the busy part of the day, a stretch of low-stimulation downtime, dim lights, no crowds, no demands, helps reset before the next thing happens.

5 Read the cues rather than waiting to be told.

Tiredness and overload can show up as quietness or stillness rather than obvious distress, especially in a child who has just been sitting still in a car. Watching for the early signs matters more than waiting for a clear signal.

6 Let the day shape the plan, not the other way around.

If something is working, stay a little longer. If it isn't, leave earlier than planned. The itinerary serves the child, not the other way around.