

Helping our young adults with autism to be independent in travelling by public transport

Helping our young adults with autism learn to take public transport could be a daunting task for many parents. A few parents who have started the challenge came forward to share their journeys: some arduous, some eventful, some slow and steady, but each progressively.

Ms Florence, the mother of a boy aged 17, engaged the support of her immediate and extended family members to start her son's "training" programme. Some strategies she explored:

- Use pictures (e.g. MRT station signboard, bus number) and videos (e.g. sound of MRT announcement) to show the steps and what to expect
- Initially, an accompanying adult trains him on the key steps (e.g. look out for the right bus while waiting, flag down the bus *in the way the bus driver can see your signal!*)
- Replace the adult with a peer (his cousin) to put her son on alert when travelling
- Teach the son to text her at different steps e.g. boarded the bus
- Get his brother to wait for him at the destination bus-stop to assure him
- Practice! Practice! Practice! Across a few months for each phase
- Plan for contingency and teach him how to respond e.g. what if he loses his bus card, what if he misses the stop, what if the bus breaks down, what if the MRT breaks down, what if he is lost, etc.
- Prepare him with visuals of whom he can ask for help from (e.g. MRT staff in uniform)
- Teach him to contact parents via messaging



Ms Amelia, the mother of a child aged 12, started her son earlier. She would take him in her car and show him the bus route. She also shared how her son was lost on two occasions because he took the wrong bus. Sometimes he also overslept on the bus. Now, he is able to contact his mother over video call when he needs help. He has also learnt what to do if he misses the bus stop. She shared that it is important to put a tag with emergency contacts and school name in his school bag so that the public can assist him when required.

Ms Hazel, the mother of a boy aged 17, also shared her challenges and success stories. She taught her son to take public transport home from school with a series of careful scaffolding. She started by meeting him outside the school gate. Next, she moved further to meet him at the traffic light, then bus stop, then the bus interchange, then the MRT station, etc. Progressively, her boy learnt to be more independent on each segment of the route. She mentioned that her boy does not press the bell before the bus reaches the destination bus stop. Others suggested providing him with a visual step-by-step guide, with this step explicitly stated.

Other parents also raised questions such as what if our child gets bullied on the bus, what if he is stressed by crying babies, does our child need to be able to use a mobile phone before he starts learning to take public transport, etc. Other parents and staff clarified their doubts and shared from their own experiences how they have taught their child to manage.

The parents also shared some useful apps to track where their child is, and the funds on his bus card e.g. Life360 and Transit Link Simply Go.



It was indeed a fruitful session that parents gathered many useful tips to start or continue their journeys 😊