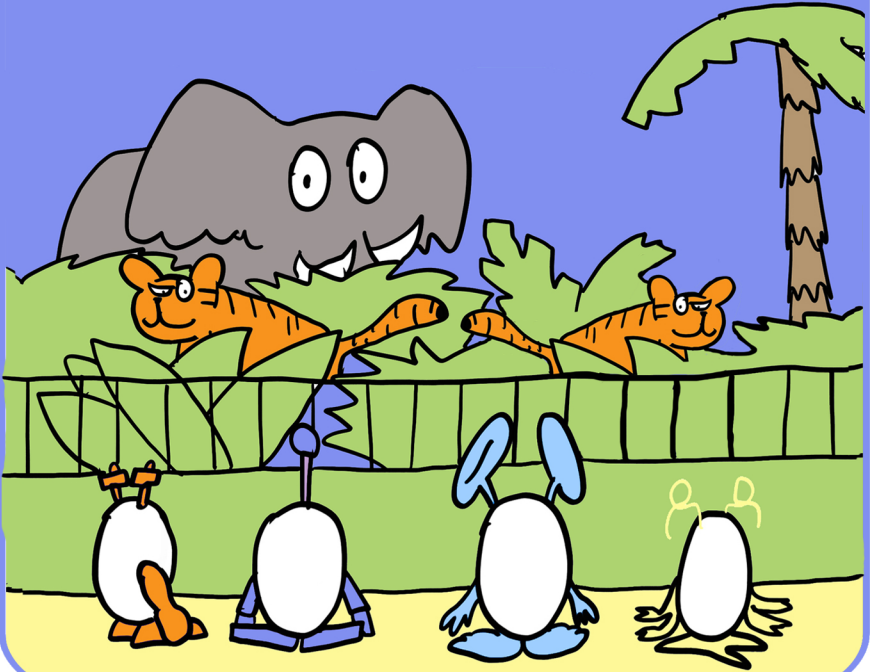


The Pods go to... the zoo!

A guide
for parents and carers



Every adventure
requires a first step



This guide has been compiled by The Pods

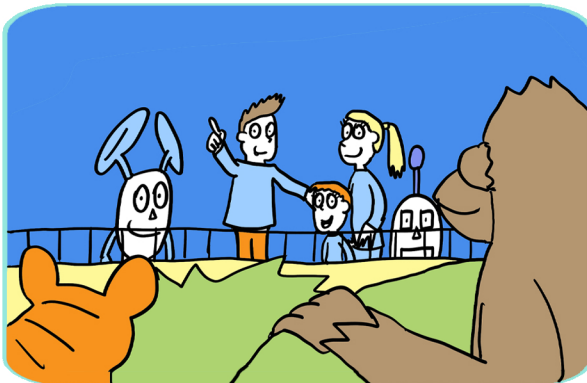
Huge thanks to

Rachel Barnett-Jones - Script Writer
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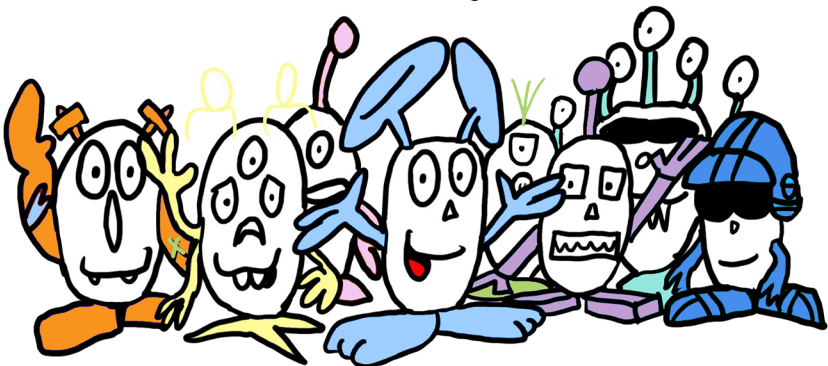
Introduction

This **PodPack** has been made to help you and your child feel more confident and comfortable when trying new experiences, with the help of our ASD-friendly **Pod Characters**!

We know that new places and experiences can sometimes feel overwhelming, so we've put together some tools to help you navigate the journey. Inside, you'll find a social story that shows your child what to expect when going to the zoo, helping them to understand what might happen and giving you opportunities to have conversations before you go so you all feel really well prepared. There are also pages to help you both explore different sights, sounds, and feelings, and tools to help your child communicate their needs. You can use our templates to create your own personal journey which includes details of what you're expecting to see and do on your adventure.

We hope this pack makes your day out at the zoo smooth and enjoyable.

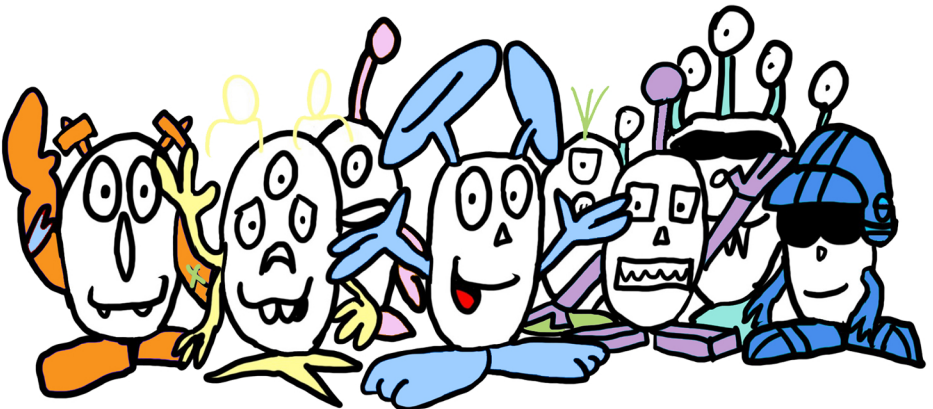
The Pods



Who are The Pods?

The Pods are a group of eight very different and diverse characters, with their own quirks and individual personality traits. Together they celebrate each other's strengths and through humour and teamwork they address all of life's ups, downs and triumphs.

The Pods (and their team of humans) create evidence-led, expert-reviewed therapeutic tools for SEND families such as social stories, flashcards, animations and resource packs to help families navigate the challenges and emotions that can occur in new experiences and situations.



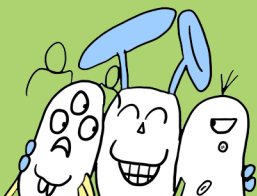
A message from The Pods

SEND children can experience a range of difficulties when going out into the community. Sensory sensitivities are common, making bright lights, loud noises, strong smells, or busy environments overwhelming and distressing.

Unfamiliar places or changes to routine may trigger anxiety, confusion, or emotional outbursts. Social situations can also be challenging, as autistic children may find it difficult to communicate their needs, read social cues, or interact with others, sometimes leading to misunderstandings. Transitions between activities or environments can cause stress or resistance, especially if they are unexpected. In some cases, there may be safety concerns, particularly if the child has limited awareness of hazards or is prone to wandering.

These issues highlight the importance of preparation, support, and understanding from caregivers and members of the public. With the right strategies and accommodations, outings can be made more manageable and enjoyable for autistic children and their families.

Sometimes the greatest
gift you can give another
is to include them



What is a Social Story?

Social stories are short stories that describe a specific place, event, or activity. They tell you what might happen, who you might see, and what you might do. They often focus on social cues – the little hints that tell you how people might be feeling or what they might do next.

Take one
step at a time



Why they help

For some children, especially those who are neurodivergent, new situations can feel scary because they don't know what to expect. Social stories help make things more predictable. When you know what might happen, it can make you feel less worried and more ready to try new things. Talking (or playing) at new things first can take the worry out of them.

Understanding and Preparing for a trip to the Zoo

Zoos can present a lot of new experiences that might feel tricky. You can use these suggestions to talk through potential "flashpoints" and prepare as a family. Role-playing different scenarios can also be a helpful way to get ready for your adventure.

Overwhelming Crowds

Zoos can be very busy with lots of people moving around, which might feel crowded or overwhelming.

Suggestion

Quiet Zones: Many zoos have quieter areas or chill-out zones. Research a map of the zoo beforehand to identify these spots.

Meeting Point: Establish a clear meeting point if you get separated and remind your child of it occasionally.

Sensory Breaks: Plan for regular sensory breaks away from the main crowds.



Loud & different noises

Zoos are full of new sounds from all the animals and activities. These might be louder or different than sounds your child is used to.

Suggestion

Ear Defenders: Bring a good pair of ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones.

Pre-arranged Signal: Agree on a pre-arranged signal (like a hand squeeze or a specific gesture) your child can use if they're feeling overwhelmed by the noise.

Getting Ready Together

Sometimes, before doing something new, like going to a zoo, it can really help us to talk about it first.

You might want to set aside a few blocks of time to talk through your day at the zoo and even role-play some scenarios. Depending on your child's age, you could act out parts of the zoo experience using toys, or even puppets if you have them.

Here are some stages of your zoo adventure to act out and discuss:

Packing

What will you bring in your bag? Sunscreen, a hat, a favorite toy, ear defenders?

Leaving the house and the journey

How will you get there? What will the car ride or walk be like?

Arriving at the zoo

What will it look like when you first get there? Will there be lots of people?

Visiting the zoo animals

What animals might you see?

Exploring the zoo activities

What kind of things can you do at the zoo?

Taking a break

What will you do if you feel overwhelmed or need a quiet moment?

Where can you go for a sensory break?

Going home

What will it be like when the day trip is over and it's time to leave?

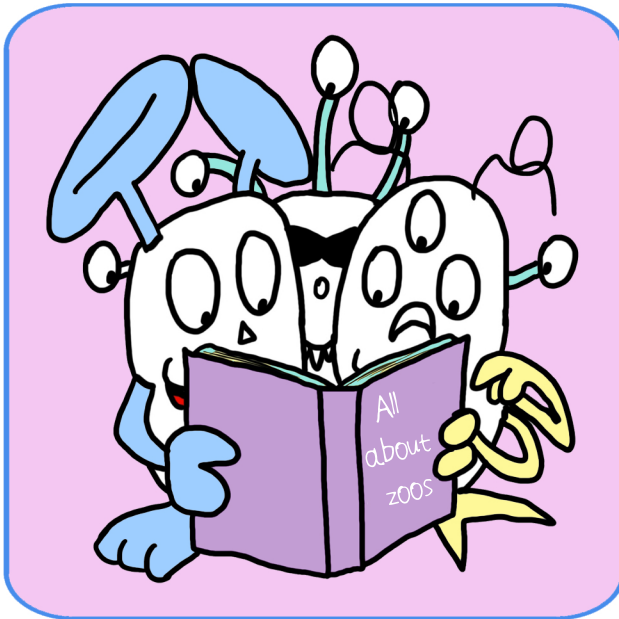
This preparation can help your child feel more in control and ready for the exciting but sometimes overwhelming, zoo environment.

Talking it Through

We can talk about what might happen at the zoo.

We can look at pictures and videos of zoos together.

We can try to find the answers to any questions
ahead of times!



Role Play!

Role Play Suggestions

We can pretend to arrive at the zoo and look all around us.

We can pretend we're showing our tickets to the person on the gate.

We can pretend we're visiting the animals, going on a ride, playing a game, having a snack or looking around the shop at the zoo.

We could name the animals.

Getting ready like this can make going to the zoo feel more familiar and less like a surprise. It's like knowing the story before you watch the movie - it can make it even more fun!



Benefits of Role Playing

There are many benefits to role-playing a new situation ahead of the experience:

Practicing Social Skills

Pretending to be different people or in different situations gives children a chance to try out things like talking to others, taking turns, and understanding how people might feel. It's a practice run for real-life social skills.

Understanding Feelings

Role play can help children explore and understand different emotions. If they pretend to be sad, happy, or even a little scared, it can help them learn what those feelings might look and feel like and how to deal with them, with your support and in a safe and familiar environment.

Making Sense of New Situations

If there's something new coming up, like going to the zoo, pretending what it might be like can make it feel less scary and more familiar.

Problem solving, safely

If you're guiding the role-play then you can invent problems (like a delay, a long wait in a queue, or not liking the noise or smell of an animal) so that you can practice solutions ahead of time, taking the anxiety out of the adventure.

Boosting Communication

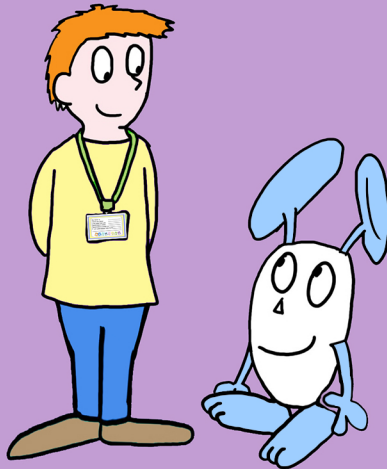
Sometimes it can be tricky to say what you mean. Role play gives children a chance to practice using words and actions to communicate in different ways.

Letting Imagination Shine

Pretending is fun. It encourages children's natural creativity and helps them to explore their amazing imaginations in a way that feels comfortable for them.

You might like to Print this handy ID card and
Put it in your child's pocket or on a lanyard.

My name is _____
I like to be called _____
I may need help with _____
Parent/carer's name _____
Parent/carer's contact no. _____
If I am upset please help me by _____



Have fun!

We know that this journey isn't always easy and we hope that this PodPack has helped you to take some of the stress out of your preparations for your outing.

Let the adventures begin!



Wherever you want to go...
the Pods can help you get there!

For more about *The Pods* scan the QR code
or visit www.meetthepods.com

