



happykidsholidays

happykidsholidays is a non profit making association that began operating in January 2009. Its aim is to support families with children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and adult individuals with an ASD so that they can enjoy the same kinds of holidays as everyone else.


happykidsholidays provides:

- A website advertising properties that are Autism friendly
- Recommendations to families to find “best fit” between themselves and properties
- Planning service for families, using methods that are proven to support people with an ASD
- Practical support for both families and property owners, if necessary, during the holiday
- Ongoing advice and support for property owners including more in depth training on ASDs and related conditions, if required.

happykidsholidays also aims to develop understanding and acceptance of ASD within the wider community.

about me

I was a teacher in UK from 1994 until I moved to Dordogne, France in 2006. I worked in mainstream and special primary and secondary schools, for the National Autistic Society, and for Sheffield LEA Autism service. Many of the families I worked with never had a holiday, but they all had a huge need for a break.



Once I became lucky enough to live in such a beautiful place, I decided to try and enable people to have the holidays they deserved, so I talked to some people who agreed with me and *happykidsholidays* was born.



What are the advantages for property owners?



It is estimated that at least one in 100 people in the UK has an ASD. This is a large number of families who currently may not go on holiday but who would like to, if the conditions were right.

In a recent survey of this client group, every single person said they would choose somewhere described as “Autism friendly” over any other property, and for most, this was their main criteria in choosing a property.


happykidsholidays has already made links with many organisations that support families with an ASD and several families who are already waiting for an appropriate holiday property. These families will almost certainly become long term clients if they find suitable accommodation. They will also belong to close support networks, with other people who have difficulties finding appropriate holiday accommodation, and will no doubt pass on recommendations.

happykidsholidays is not just another website for advertising gites. We offer a unique service that supports a group of people who currently often find it difficult to holiday abroad, but who would like to nonetheless.

All our marketing is specifically targeted. We are included on many Local Authority and Children’s Information Service databases as holiday service providers, as well as on listings for various charity and local support groups. We are also members of Tourism For All, and as such, benefit from their support and targeted advertising.


Within days of our launch, information about *happykidsholidays* started appearing on several major parent and ASD web forums and we’ve had a fantastic response from the UK and from as far afield as Canada.

What is ASD?



Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong condition that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder describes a group of disorders, including autism and Asperger Syndrome. The word 'spectrum' is used because the characteristics of the condition vary from one person to another. Those with autism may also have a



learning disability. Those who have Asperger Syndrome tend to have average, or above average, intelligence, but still have difficulty making sense of the world.

The characteristics of an ASD such as autism or Asperger Syndrome can also vary from person to person. They can also be different for the same person at different times in their life and across different environments.

social interaction

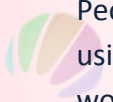
A person who has an ASD may find it hard to relate to other people.

They may:

- seem distant or detached,
- have little or no interest in other people,
- find it difficult to make friends,
- find it difficult to make eye contact with other people,
- want to have social contact but have difficulty knowing how to initiate it,
- not understand other people's emotions, and have difficulty managing their own emotions, and
- prefer to spend time alone.





social communication

A person who has an ASD may have difficulty using verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and some people never acquire speech throughout their lives.



People with an ASD who do speak may use speech in an over-complicated way, using odd phrases, or odd choices of words. They may also make up their own words or phrases, and use more words than are necessary to explain simple things. Someone with an ASD may also have difficulty:

- expressing themselves well,

- 
- understanding gestures, facial expressions, or tones of voice,
 - using gestures to communicate, and
 - understanding instructions.
 - Imagination
- 
- 
- 


Children with an ASD may:

- play the same games over and over, or play with games designed for children younger than themselves,
- get upset if their daily routines are interrupted in any way,
- show repetitive behaviours, such as hand flapping or spinning,
- have difficulty in planning and thinking about the future.
- In addition, children and adults may develop obsessions, for example, with specific objects, lists, timetables or routines.
- Sensory and movement difficulties

Most people with an ASD also have sensory difficulties. This means that they may be oversensitive to specific things like touch, certain textures, light levels, or sound. They may also have problems with movement. A person with an ASD may appear clumsy or have an unusual way of walking.


Of course, every person with, or without, ASD is different!

Why does an ASD prevent people from going on holidays?



There are two main reasons.

People with an ASD often like routines and can sometimes become upset if things are different from what they're used to. They also generally don't like surprises and



uncertainty. This can mean they get very anxious in the run up to a holiday, even if, once they're there they can accept and enjoy their new routine.

Some children with an ASD don't behave in ways that are generally considered "normal." For example a ten year old may squeal with fear, run round flapping his arms with joy or fall on the floor in a tantrum. Occasionally a child may break something. Sometimes they say inappropriate things in public. Most 10 year olds would have developed embarrassment but children with an ASD are often slow to develop this.

So, if a parent has experienced their child behaving like this in public and heard the tuts of disapproval, or if they know that their child may become anxious in preparing for their holiday, it's often much easier not to go. Of course, this means that the whole family, including siblings, miss out on what is often a much needed break.


What does 'autism friendly' or 'ASD friendly' mean?

You don't need any particular skills or even a specially adapted property. The most important thing is that you are accepting of the person with an ASD and his or her family. When asked what they wanted from a holiday property, the overwhelming response of parents was, "I want it to be okay for my child to be themselves."

There may also be some practical things you can do to make your property more appealing to this group of holidaymakers.

How can I make my property ASD friendly?

Most importantly, make sure you're tolerant of difference!



There are some practical things you can do, but as each child is different, it's probably best to start with what your property has already got on offer and then consider what you might be able to do to broaden your appeal and attract a wider range of families. For example, if you added a detachable stair gate, you could have it in place for a particular family but it wouldn't hinder guests at other times. If you were prepared to remove ornaments for a week, it might mean a family coming because it's one less thing for them to worry about.



We have a range of questions that we ask about your property, which include :

- Does your property have any private space outside?
- Does your property have a clear boundary (e.g. fence)?
- Are there any potential dangers on or near your property (e.g. stream, road)? If so, please describe
- What is your policy about breakages?
- Would you be prepared to remove ornaments etc for a week if necessary for a family?
- How close is the nearest railway?
- Can you lock the windows?


Please don't worry if your property won't be suitable! Many families and older people with an ASD don't require any physical adaptations at all, just the knowledge that they're going somewhere they're understood, or at least accepted.

Is there a cost to advertise with happykidsholidays?

We charge 60 Euros a year to advertise your property with *happykidsholidays*. We are a non profit making organisation but unfortunately we have to charge this to cover our costs.

For this, you will receive

- practical advice on how to make your property as ASD friendly as possible.
- You will have a page on our website, complete with 6 photos and both general and ASD specific information about your property.
- As part of our package you will receive detailed information about ASD and ongoing support in this area. If you require further in depth training, either as an individual or as part of a group, we can arrange this for you for a small additional cost.



In return, we ask that you commit to acting within our ethos of welcoming all visitors, even if this means doing something slightly differently.

I want join!

If, after reading this information you feel you would like to be a part of **happykidsholidays** all we ask you to do is email at emma@happykidsholidays.com with the following information :

- name
- address
- phone number
- email
- your property website address (if you have one) or a simple description of your property

Once we receive this information we will phone you to discuss your property. We'll also be able to provide further information about ASD and how best you could prepare to welcome clients with ASD.

Depending on your location, we may ask to visit your property so that **happykidsholidays** can offer an enhanced service to our clients in terms of the support they receive from us (not you) whilst they are on holiday.

Once all our information has been gathered and we are all happy to proceed, your property is added to our property listing and you can start offering holidays to children, families and adults living with an ASD!



I have some more questions

If there is anything you feel unsure of or that hasn't been answered here please feel free to contact **happykidsholidays** on emma@happykidsholidays.com