

A REVIEW: New App Changes the Way Families Find Autism Friendly Businesses

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These days it takes a little more than a village to find a place out in the world that would be enjoyable for your child with autism. So what's a father from Pennsylvania to do when he's looking for a safe and fun place to take his son? He creates an app so he can get feedback from everyone!

Topher Wurts has a 13-year-old son named Kirby who has autism. He is the creator of Autism Village, a new free app available for iOS and Android which can help parents with children on the spectrum find autism friendly places to take their child.

Have you ever wondered if your child may have difficulty going somewhere due to sensory, diet, or other issues? Have you ever wondered about a certain therapy or an individual therapist but didn't have anyone to ask? Have you ever asked yourself: Where can we go when we leave the house? Where can we go for a family dinner? How can I find someone who would be able to cut my child's hair? Is there a local playground that is safe? Autism Village can answer all of these questions and more.

Autism Village is an app similar to "Yelp" where parents can search businesses to see if they are autism friendly. Individuals can also leave a review for the business and rate them according to how well they fit the Autism Village ideals. In an interview with News 8 WKBT-TV, Wurts stated, "All the families will be able to share the good and the bad for others to find and discover."

As an added bonus, workers at businesses can get special training to earn the Autism Village Seal of Approval. You can just look in their window for the seal and know it is an autism friendly business.

I had the opportunity to use the app in both southwest Florida and northeast Pennsylvania. I was pleasantly surprised to see how many businesses

had been reviewed and recommended by individuals in the area. When you open the app it automatically focuses in on your local area but you can easily search different parts of the country by going to the Discover tab. I explored various areas around the U.S. including but not limited to Virginia Beach, Nashville, and Orlando. I found hotels, therapists, schools, local parks and attractions all rated with the 5-Star Autism Village rating system. You can also become a "fan" of a place and it will save it for you. Under the profile tab you can see your followers, leave reviews and post photos. If you were thinking of vacationing somewhere but you weren't sure if it would be a good fit for your family, this app is your saving grace.

The app was released in November of 2015 and it already has over 9,000 users and approximately 100 new users are added per day! With this growth it will become easier and easier to find the perfect place for you and your family.

Thank you, Topher Wurts, for making the world much easier to navigate for families with autistic children.

Lisa Timms has a Master of Science Degree from the University of Scranton. She is the author of "60 Social Situations and Discussion Starters" published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. You can find her book online at <http://www.jkp.com/catalogue/book/9781849058629>. She is also the creator of The Timms Social Skills Program. A live, fun, interactive, peer-to-peer online social skills program which is offered nationally for students ages 6-18 with Autism, Aspergers, ADHD and/or related disabilities or atypical students who may be struggling with their problem solving and/or social skills.

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