



Ideas for Making Short and Long Trips Less Stressful

Family vacations create lifelong memories and part of the experience is traveling to the location. For some children this can be exciting while for others it can be stressful. This article includes ideas for reducing stress before and during travel.

1. Prepare Children – Reduce anxiety by telling children what to expect. Prepare children by reading books, writing stories, and discussing the upcoming trip. If the experience is new be sure to explain it to the child. For example, if a child is flying for the first time, explain the security process of taking off their shoes, putting their possessions in a machine, and waiting to go through screening. Clearly outline the steps to prepare children. Additionally, let children know how long the trip is going to be or set a timer so children know when they will arrive. Some children may benefit from a picture or word schedule of the events on the trip. The schedule allows children to understand visually what is happening next. Be sure to update children on traffic jams or flight delays that change their travel time.

2. Involve Children – Let children help pack their bag. This can prepare children for changes in the weather, trip related events, and items they will have access to on the trip. Packing is a great opportunity to teach organization and planning skills. Discuss different clothes that are appropriate for events. For example, discuss how they are packing a nice outfit for Thanksgiving dinner, but warm play clothes for playing outside with their cousins after the meal. Give children choices in items. For example, let children select one of three sweaters to wear for a nice dinner. Letting children make choices involves children and lets them take an active role in the experience. During the trip have maps and pictures of people or places they are going to visit to give them something to look at and discuss related to the trip.

3. Keep Comfort in Mind – Whether driving or flying, trips are more stressful and unpleasant when children are uncomfortable. Be sure there is plenty of personal space in the car. Stop regularly so children can stretch and use the restroom. Although planes are limited by space, children often like to look out the window. An inside seat on a plane also limits contact from other people walking up and down the aisle. Bring lollipops or gum to help children's ears adjust with the pressure changes.



From *Going Places*

4. Bring Activities – Have children select a few stories or games for the trip. Keep portability in mind as well as the length of time the activity holds the child's interest. Often children like videos and video games. These are engaging for children, but old-fashioned car games such as *I Spy* or *Twenty Questions* are ways to entertain and teach while communicating with children.

5. Use Positive Reinforcement – Regularly praise children for sitting, listening, and being a good traveler. Be clear about what they did well such as, 'Great job waiting for your turn in security and listening to the security officer.' Be sure to consistently reinforce behavior throughout a long drive or flight to let children know you see they are doing a good job.

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