



Six Tips for Vacations and Weekend Trips

Family vacations create memories, teach children about new places, and provide an often much needed break. Unfortunately, some children have a difficult time with new situations, people, and schedules. This article includes ideas for making vacations and weekend trips less stressful and more enjoyable before, during, and after the trip.

1. Prepare Kids - Unfamiliar places and situations can be very stressful for some children. Prepare children for a trip by showing them websites, brochures, or guidebooks. Pictures of lodging, activities, people going on the trip, and transportation are helpful for setting expectations. If you are flying, discuss the security process and etiquette for sitting on the plane (using an inside voice, keeping on a seatbelt, having feet off the seat in front of them).

2. Involve Kids in Planning – If you are debating where to go, involve children in the decision. Research different trips and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each place. Consider children's interests in the decision. Because you loved the beach as a child does not mean your child who does not swim, sunburns easily, and finds the feel of sand upsetting will like the beach. Before a trip, let children help pack their suitcases so they know what they will have with them. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the weather and appropriate clothes for activities. Pack and have readily available a small bag of toys and books for car rides, unexpected waiting periods, and downtimes.

3. Create a Sense of Familiarity - Consider children's routines and familiar possessions when planning trips. Sleep schedules may be difficult to follow, but keep wake up and bedtime as close to the child's usual schedule as possible. Familiar objects also help children with consistency. If a child reads a favorite story before bed, carries personal items in a backpack, or uses a stress ball, be sure to pack these items.

4. Keep Children Aware of the Schedule – Many children benefit from very structured schedules and the lack of a familiar schedule on a vacation can be upsetting. If children use written or picture schedules, create one for the trip. Some children just need a verbal reminder of what to expect next or when to change activities. Many times consistently keeping children notified of the schedule and schedule changes helps them relax and transition through the day.

5. Remember Downtime is Important – Families often over plan vacations. Spending time with friends and family, going from one location to another, or doing a number of things at one place can exhaust children. Plan rest periods so children can read, play a game, or nap.

6. Create Memories – Trips are fun and exciting, but children often forget some of it when they return home. Buy a travel diary before the trip. Every evening discuss the day's events. Have children write in the journal. They can add pictures, tickets, and brochures from the day. Read the book during the year to remember the experience, encourage communication, and plan future trips.

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