

Preparation Makes Family Travel Easier

by Bronwyn Holman

As [the holidays] approach, many families will be climbing into planes, trains, and automobiles to visit points beyond. Traveling with young children presents some challenges, but with planning, a trip can be a fun experience for everyone.

Here are some ideas to make your trip easier:

- **Pick travel times that are family friendly.** Keeping your child's schedule as normal as possible will help her cope with traveling.

- **Practice traveling.** Read books and tell stories about traveling. Pretend you are traveling on a plane or in a car. Talk to your child about how to behave on planes and in airports.

- **Bring entertainment!** Young babies are relatively easy to pacify because they will mostly sleep or enjoy being held.

Newly mobile children are more challenging—these kids generally want to be “on the go.” In addition, their attention span and manual dexterity aren't developed enough to sit and look at books or color for a long time. Sing songs and tell stories, and whenever possible, get up and walk around. Most parents find that nap time is the best time to travel with this age group.

Travel experts suggest that for a toddler or preschooler, you have one activity for every 15 minutes of travel. The night before the trip, choose a bag for your child and have him help you pick a few special items to go in it. A favorite book or special toy will make new situations more comfortable.

Once he has put in his items, you can fill in the gaps. Some suggestions are: a small box of crayons and a new coloring/activity book, one new story book, a variety of stickers with an empty notebook to put them in, play dough, stamps and ink pad, and some favorite story books from home.

Older children enjoy a portable tape player with tapes of familiar songs or nursery rhymes to play—but make sure your child is used to wearing headphones before he gets on the plane.

- **Bring food!** The best food for a small child when traveling is the food to which she is accustomed. Plan to have enough food for your child to eat for the entire length of travel. Bring drinks that aren't messy, such as juice boxes and a spare sippy cup for filling with water. If you're flying, bring one item that you know your child will eat or drink for take-off and landing to help ease the pressure on her ears during altitude changes—lollipops are great for this and most kids think they're a real treat!

- **Plan to be at your child's beck and call.** Traveling is no time for a parent to sit and read a good book. Go into the day knowing that you will need to be “on call” 100 percent of the time for the duration of travel and your day will go smoother.

- **Remember seatbelt safety.** Whether you are in your car or on an airplane, your child's car seat is an essential travel buddy. In an unfamiliar setting, the added security of a familiar car seat can go a long way toward eliminating the stress of travel.

- **Keep a supply of “emergency” items in the diaper bag.** Stock with wet wipes, diapers, a flashlight, band-aids, bottled water, lightweight blanket, change of clothes, Tylenol, Benadryl, and teething gels, if appropriate. Be prepared.

• **Enjoy yourself.** See the world of travel through your child's eyes. Point out all the new things that you see—whether you are in the air or on the road. This is a great opportunity to reinforce some of the things he may be learning by looking for colors, shapes, even counting things that you see.

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