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Parenting the Preschooler

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Traveling With Children

Plan Ahead

If you plan ahead, you can make traveling fun for both you and your children. Tell your child about the trip. Children do better when they know what to expect. Explain what day and time you will leave, how you will travel, how long you will stay, what you will pack, what you will do on the way and when you get there. Talk about the people and places you're going to see. Share photographs of them with your child. Order brochures from your destination's visitor bureau and have them addressed to your children. Highlight your route on a map and then laminate the map and let the children use color markers to note the distance you travel each day.

Rules of the Road

Buckle up in car seats or seat belts. Children under four years of age should be in a car seat while traveling by plane or car. Set an example. If adults they trust are consistent users of seat belts, children will want to be like them. Praise your child. Tell her how nicely she sits in the car seat.

If you are traveling by plane, right before departure, tell your child exactly what to expect on that part of the trip. For example, "First we will find our seats and store our coats overhead. Then we will set up your travel bag so you can reach it. You may play with the things in your bag for two hours before the plane lands. Once your seat belt is on and we are ready to take off, I'll give you some gum."

At the start and end of each flight, changes in air pressure will make your ears pop. If you can't get your ears to pop, they will really hurt! Young children

don't know how to pop their ears, but you can teach them. Sucking on lifesaver candy or chewing gum often helps. Babies have special problems with this, but sucking on a bottle during take-off and landing often works.

When you fly with a young child, request a child car seat when you reserve your car.

If you are traveling by car, use the restroom before leaving and plan rest stops at least every two hours along the way. Let your child stretch and burn off some energy. While taking a rest stop: toss a frisbee, play catch with a beach ball, jump rope, make bubbles, or eat a snack.

Be sure the passenger area of the car is free of heavy things that could fly around or injure someone in a sudden stop. Before starting, decide where everyone will be sitting. Keep the car doors locked and never leave children unattended in the car. Keep hands away from the windows.

Children travel best when their stomachs are full and their bladders are empty. Start each day with a good nutritious breakfast. Schedule at least one hot, restful meal a day. Take time to get enough sleep.

Keep a positive attitude. Smile and laugh. Look for things that are funny. Remember that keeping children "silent and well behaved all the time" just can't be done.

Pack a Travel Bag for Your Child

Pack all-time favorites, but add a new book, markers, or other item for peak entertainment value.

Here are some ideas for travel games and activities:

- ▶ Crayons, markers, pencils and paper
- ▶ Coloring books
- ▶ Activity books (mazes, word search, hidden pictures, etc.)
- ▶ Magazines
- ▶ Reading books
- ▶ Notebook
- ▶ Puppets
- ▶ Stuffed animals and dolls
- ▶ Deck of cards
- ▶ Stickers and sticker book
- ▶ Cassette player and tapes of stories and songs
- ▶ Comic books
- ▶ Portable work station (clipboard or covered cake pan)
- ▶ Magic slate boards
- ▶ Tiny cars
- ▶ Chalkboard and chalk
- ▶ Magnetized puzzles
- ▶ Tape player with headphones

A few well chosen items are better than too many. Throughout the trip, help your child keep the bag organized so nothing is misplaced or left behind.

Pack a Parent Travel Bag

Taking a few foods along in the car can help. A small cooler will come in handy for items that need refrigeration. Some good snack choices are:

- ▶ Fruit
- ▶ Raw vegetables
- ▶ Crackers
- ▶ Raisins
- ▶ Pretzels
- ▶ Bread sticks
- ▶ Cereals

Avoid foods that can cause choking (grapes, carrot pieces, etc.), spoil quickly, are sticky or salty, or leave crumbs.

Bring your child's pillow, small blanket, or "sleep buddy" to add a touch of home to the car.

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Fear of Using a Strange Toilet

Young children are sometimes fearful of using a strange, unknown bathroom, and this can be a real problem on a long trip. The first thing you can do is to join them in the bathroom stall, to offer the comfort of a trusted adult. In fact, a helpful "rule of the road" is that everyone in the car must sit on the toilet -- whether or not they have to really use it -- before the trip continues. If your youngster still balks at the sight of that gas station restroom, plan on a small incentive: "We aren't leaving until everyone visits the bathroom, but everyone gets pretzels as soon as we're on the road again!"

With very young children, carrying their training potty or a familiar insert for the adult potty chair (which makes the seat smaller) can be well worth the trouble.

Do's and Don'ts for Travel with Children

- Do** plan ahead, but
- Don't** plan to do everything you plan;
- Do** take time for rest and good nourishment;
- Don't** take your home schedule along;
- Do** find places for running, shouting and playing;
- Don't** overtax their staying power in restaurants and museums;
- Do** let them know that you're enjoying their company;
- Don't** be amazed at how long you'll treasure the memories.

After the Trip

Children often resist transitions and will show frustration. Expect the last day to be a transition day when you start making the mental transition back to home. Even when home, expect there to be some adjustment time for all. Plan to arrive home in time for a relaxed unpacking and restful night's sleep before re-entry into everyday life.

Sources:

- Sharon Hills-Bonczyk. "Traveling with Children." Family Information Services. March 1998.
- Kay Stanek. "Traveling Tips for Young Children." Growing Together. Dodge County UW-Extension, Spring 1990.

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