Tips for successful car travel with kids

Travelling by car can be one of the best ways for a family to get out and about or take a vacation on a budget. However, if you don't plan carefully, it can also be a stressful experience. Remember that great car trips don't happen by accident, they take planning and preparation.



Involve your children in your plans

Talk about where you're going. Read snippets from guidebooks and the internet. Borrow a video from the library. If you plan on stopping for food let the children pick the place. If you plan on picnicking, let the children help you choose and prepare what you'll eat. Help young children understand the length of time that you'll all be away. Instead of days, which little children find difficult to grasp, tell them how many "sleep times" or "bed times" the trip will last. Let each child choose a favourite toy or activity to add to the car.

What to take in the car

Take a first-aid bag, including both children's and adult pain killers.

If you are taking a baby, pack bottles of formula in a cooler, with a re-freezable ice pack and a large towel and a plastic garbage bag to help with diaper changes along the way.

To avoid boredom

- Give each child a container or bag of small toys, books, comics and crayons and paper.
- Keep a separate bag in the front with you, packed with new, wrapped items from dollar stores or garage sales. Bring the bag out and let each child dip in when times get bad.
- Bring CD players and headphones, along with songs and stories on tape.
- Some families have vehicles with video monitors where children can watch movies.
- Bring a bag of small non-sticky snacks and juice boxes or sippy cups.
- Make frequent short stops where you can stretch your legs and the children can let off steam.
- Don't forget the good old car games like I-spy. They still work.

To avoid sticky messes

- Bring far more moist wipes, paper towels and plastic bags than you think you need—you're bound to use them all.
- A wet face cloth wrapped around an ice cube in a plastic bag can be cooling and refreshing for a hot, fretful child.
- Avoid pop cans in the car. They nearly always spill.
- No ice cream or popsicles in the car.
- Avoid candy, chocolate and crumbly snacks in the car. Choose raw vegetables or not too juicy fruits.
- Take along a dustpan and brush and sweep out crumbs each night.

Get off to a good start

- The longer your children can sleep in the car, the happier everyone will be.
- If you have someone who will share driving duties, set off at night when the children are tired.

- If you don’t want to drive overnight, try to make a very early start when the children will still be sleepy. Put them in the car in their PJ’s with a favourite blanket to snuggle up to.

- Be sure everyone stays buckled up.

With a little preparation you can keep travel tensions to a minimum and ensure that your family continues to have fun on the open road!