

## **On the Road: Reduce Family Stress in the Car**

**By Ellen Rondina**

*Q: I'd like to take my family on a vacation and travel by car, but even short road trips to Grandma's House can be stressful. Is it reasonable to take a family vacation by car, and how can I minimize the stress and maximize the fun?*

A: Yes!! It is not only a reasonable idea; it is a great option for families! Traveling by car gives you flexibility and is usually cost effective. The traveling can become a memorable part of the vacation. Here are some strategies that can help your family have fun regardless of the age of your children and length of the journey. Go ahead and try them out on your way to Grandma's!!



### **Include the children in the planning.**

- Get or create a map of your route and talk about where you are going.
- To minimize the questions, “Are we there yet?”, or “How much longer?”, have your older children put pennies, peanuts, something small that represents the distance you will be traveling, into a jar. Bring along an empty jar and have your children transfer these objects into the empty jar as you reach each pre-determined destination marker.
- Have each child pack her own little bag of favorite things.
- Talk about where you will be going and what you might see along the way!
- Decide who is going to sit where in the car. Sometimes it is best to have one parent sit in the back.
- Decide ahead of time what is going to happen if fighting ensues. Make a contract as a family and bring it with you.
- Use sleeping times to your advantage! Traveling during nighttime hours and nap hours can help!

### **Bring along a grab bag of new items.**

- Select a wrapping paper or design for each child and wrap a couple of new items to be chosen along the way. It doesn't need to be anything expensive: plastic animals, toy cars, stickers, activity books, cards, etc... The gifts can even be coordinated with a particular place that you know you will be visiting or passing through.

### **Pack food and Snack regularly.**

- Plan on having meals on the road. You never know when the next family-friendly restaurant is going to appear, and children need to eat when they get hungry! Pack bread and peanut butter and jelly and cereal bars, and don't forget the water!

- Having healthy snacks in the car is a fun way to pass the time and keep children satisfied. Children travel better on a full stomach! You can even make edible jewelry, such as a cereal necklace, to take with you. Bring wipes for easy cleaning!

**Stop frequently.**

- Be prepared, especially if you have small children, to stop at least every two hours. Children (and adults) need to stretch their legs and release pent up energy, and everyone can take advantage of restroom facilities. Pack the children's bags on top for easy access to diapers and extra clothes.
- This is also a great time to make those peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and have a picnic lunch!
- In general, plan on the trip taking extra time with children!

**Plan fun games and quiet times.**

- There are many fun and educational games to play in the car. Check out the Disney family fun website at:  
<http://searcha.familyfun.go.com/?q=car+games&x=0&y=0>  
for License plate games, scavenger hunts, word games and number games!
- Sing songs with each other and bring along your favorite CDs to listen to.
- Read some of the children's favorite books out loud.
- Build in quiet time. Everyone needs time to just "be." Sometimes car time can be great thinking time.

Keep a positive attitude and remember to have fun! Children may be cranky and over-excited by the shift in routine, but keeping these tips in mind will minimize your stress and help you create fun travel memories with your family.

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