

KEEPING KIDS CONTENT IN THE CAR

Traveling with young children can be a challenge. Between potty stops and boredom blues setting in, parents can become frustrated and the trip becomes more of a nightmare than a fun family time. The destination looks forever away when there is crying or screaming in the backseat, fighting over toys, or constant questions sounding like 'are we there yet?'

Finding something to keep them content is the challenge. While it may seem impossible to find the perfect solution, there are many great ideas and products available to keep them entertained for hours.

When I have taken long trips with young children, I made them an activity book. In this homemade activity book there were pages to color (you can find free print pages on the internet), journal pages for them to write or draw their favorite part of the day or things they were looking forward to on the trip, and then a lot of games like connect the dots, mazes, matching, marking down the next mile marker # when they see items on a list ... etc. This helped a lot and I highly suggest printing a large one up, or a smaller one for each day or two of the trip, focusing on where your map planner says you may be that day.

Collections are also fun. Getting children excited about collecting things at different spots along the way can give them something to look forward to and something to look through each day as the collection grows. Things like napkins from each restaurant or deli you stop at, writing on it where they got it, or a sticker from each spot if you do not mind dropping a nickel each time to keep the fun going ... Rocks they collect at each stop, finding the perfect one each time is fun.

Requesting travel guides in duplicate before you leave on a trip can do wonders. With the extra sets you make up a trip packet for the children to look at, showing them pictures of where they are going and what there is to do there. If they are not of reading age, another passenger can read parts of the information booklets / pamphlets to them, either in the car or when you are stopped. Ask the local travel bureau or Chamber of Commerce if they offer any items for children too, so you may add them to the packet. Many places offer things like color books or theme books that are designed especially for children.

Bringing along one of your cookie sheets and a bag full of magnetic pieces or fridge magnets, will keep them busy for quite some time (especially if this is new to them and not something they do regularly at home).

Trivia games (with young age content) can be fun for the whole family to join in on. Pocket size magnetic games are a lot of fun if there is more than one child or they are a one player game. iPods, tape or cd players with headphones can give them a chance to get away from the pain of traveling for a bit, while listening to tunes you have pre-selected for them. Some parents allow things like handheld video games or dvd players as well, though these can add quite a few pennies to the cost of the trip if you do not already have the equipment.

I also suggest stopping for breaks and taking some gear along to make those breaks fun. We all need time to stretch our legs, and bringing snacks and some outdoor toys can make this a blast for everyone. Stopping at either a roadside rest area or a park can give you all a little break from the hectic drive and allow you all time to relax and get some exercise. We used to bring a Frisbee along in the car and would stop at rest areas to play for a few minutes, grab a drink and then head back out. The kids loved it and so did the adults. You may wish to bring a ball with you, to play catch, or a soccer ball to kick around. Not much equipment is needed to have fun.

Singing songs and sharing stories as a family can be a lot of fun. Make a list of fun songs so you don't run out of ideas, and have a list of stories you can tell as you go along. I used to have the kids addlib to my stories, and this brought a lot of fun interaction, as well as a lot of laughs. Stories can get crazy when everyone takes turns choosing the next line.

The # 1 word of advice I have for you – make sure everyone is well rested, gets a break from the car once in awhile, and that everyone eats a healthy meal at a reasonable time. These tips will give you the added edge needed to make the trip as smooth as possible. And lastly – make sure every passenger has a pillow and blanket, so they may rest when they are tired.

HAPPY TRAVELING!