

TRAVELING WITH TOTS? YES!

We are a mobile society. Families are "on the go." In many families, grandma and grandpa do not live in the same city, perhaps not even in the same state. Today's travel options and opportunities provide an open door for families to nurture long distance relationships.

Many families also travel for pleasure. A baby or toddler in the family does not mean the pleasure is gone from travel. In fact, traveling with a toddler may enrich your experience because of his wide eyed enthusiasm for adventure. He doesn't want to miss a thing!

Traveling as a family is relationship building. When you share the fun and the tribulations of "being on the road," you are deepening relationships through memories. This time of togetherness in discovery of new and exciting places will help you see each other in a new light.

Whether you are traveling several hours to grandma's house or across the country for pleasure, traveling with tots can be terrific. It doesn't have to be just a matter of survival for parents. The key to making travel a terrific experience is **PLANNING**.

PLAN

When you begin to plan for a traveling experience with young children, set realistic expectations. You will not be able to keep the same pace as an adult's only trip. Set aside your structured timetable to see it all and do it all. Adopt a more relaxed schedule that keeps you moving but allows for enjoyment of the moment. Children naturally live this way. Join them in this way of thinking as you travel.

Keep your child's personality and developmental stage in mind as you plan to travel. Some children are sensitive to changes in their environment. Fears may come to the surface as they adjust to the changes. Children may be fearful of strangers, a new sleeping environment, different foods, heights, planes, trains, etc. These fears are natural and quite common. Respect your child's sensitivi-



Photo by Howard G. Buffett

ties and fearful feelings by not forcing him into new situations without your understanding and support. Familiar items from home (stuffed toy, blanket or doll) will be comforting to your child.

Plan for relaxed freedom at each stopping point. After a time of confinement your baby or toddler will need to release some pent up energy. As he plays, he will forget whatever hardships he endured along the way. Always keep safety in mind. He will be exploring in new territory, not your baby-proofed home.

Think about your child's schedule as you plan departure, travel and arrival. You know when her behavior is most predictable and when she is at her best. You may want to plan the longest portion of the trip at her naptime. When she is most active, either stay in one place or take frequent breaks to allow her to play. Help her to enjoy the travel experience.

PREPARE

Remembering and gathering everything you will need for a trip can be overwhelming. When beginning to pack for the family, make a packing list for each member of the family. This will help keep the packing organized and break down the task into manageable steps.

When taking a baby, you will need to determine how much equipment you will need for the trip. A car seat is always needed! Anytime your child **ISSUES** is in a car she must be securely buckled. Other items you may need: stroller, front or backpacks, walker, port-a-crib or playpen.

For all trips, short or long, you will need a basic supply kit. This kit will include the basics needed to keep your child clean, fed and warm. The further away from home you travel, the more elaborate

your supply kit becomes. Possible items to include in your kit:

- Disposable washcloths
- Diapers/plastic bag for disposal
- Facial tissues
- One or two changes clothing
- Plastic bag for wet or soiled items
- Bib
- Jars of baby food or toddler snack foods
- Spoon with plastic baggie
- Bottle/cup
- Formula or fruit juice
- Pacifiers (several)
- Small blanket
- Any needed medicines/first aid kit
- Toiletries
- Compact sheet of plastic to protect sleeping areas
- Child's "lovey"

Now that you have packed the basics, it is time to think about entertaining your tot along the way. This often produces the most frustration and consumes the most energy for parents. It is helpful to look beyond just surviving and focus on using this time to enjoy and nurture the family relationships. This is easier said than done!

To aid you in creating an enjoyable atmosphere, develop a "bag of tricks." Pulling the right toy out of your bag at the right time can head off a major crisis. The experts believe you do not need to entertain your child all of the time. They encourage you to develop a feel for when to introduce a new "trick." Items to be included in your "bag of tricks:"

- Hand puppets (accompanying stories/finger-plays)
- Teething toys
- Duplos
- Stuffed animals
- Small ball
- Colorforms (stick on windows)
- Suction toys (for windows, restaurant high chairs or plane trays)
- Paper/color pencils or crayons
- Matchbox cars
- Musical tapes/talking book tapes
- Fisher Price "Little People" sets
- "Action" figures
- Books, books and more books

LET'S GO . . .

Use this opportunity away from TV and other toys to nurture your child's delight of books. He will

appreciate your undivided attention as you explore a new book or reread for the tenth time a familiar one. Older toddlers may enjoy books about the activities or sights of your trip.

BY PLANE . . . When making plane reservations, inform the airline of your needs as a family. Ask for the seats at the front of coach section that allow for a bit more space. Inquire about special food for children and infants at this time. Reconfirm any special accommodations closer to departure.

Pack as lightly as possible, especially when it comes to what you must carry through the airport and onto the plane. Tired children may also need to be carried. Plan for long waiting periods at the airports and allow for excited behavior in your child. This is an exhilarating adventure for him!

Infants and toddlers need help to equalize the air pressure within their inner ears during take-off and landings. Encourage your child to nurse, drink from a bottle or suck on a pacifier or finger when changing altitudes. An older toddler may enjoy snacking on orange sections. The tartness encourages swallowing and the smaller sections make it easier to pace this swallowing over a longer period of time.

BY TRAIN . . . Some families are choosing to travel by train to have the opportunity to enjoy one another at a slower pace. Many people recommend reserving space in the family-seating car.

A portable CD player and CDs may be added to the usual "bag of tricks" for train traveling. Be sure to bring along headphones for your child to keep fellow passengers happy.

BY CAR . . . Don't overdo your driving schedule. You may consider limiting the drive to five or six hours in one day. Try not to drive two long days back to back.

TRAVELING TIPS

To keep your baby's belongings neat and tidy, hang a shoe organizer on the back of the front seat.

Attach a few baby toys to the car seat for easy retrieval.

Food for in the car: nothing too salty, nothing crumbly and nothing that will melt.

If you want your child to have a comfortable trip, wait until you are at grandma's to put on that adorable new outfit.

Make a "surprise recording" to be played only during trips. Sing some of your child's favorite songs or read some of her favorite books. You can even ask questions to which she can respond. At the end of the recording give instructions about how to find a treat or surprise hidden in the car.

Develop a ritual or tradition that can be repeated on every family trip or vacation. These traditions provide a comforting element for your child as he faces the unknown of a new adventure in traveling. They are also great memory makers! Use your imagination to create a tradition – special foods, sing in the car, a family diary.

To help older toddlers nap during traveling time, introduce the "Vacation Fairy." The "Vacation Fairy" hides little gifts or treats in the car during sleep periods. Each time your child naps he will awaken to find a small surprise to occupy and entertain him for the next few miles.

How do you manage hungry, tired, restless young travelers as you wait for your meal in a restaurant?

Choose restaurants you know to have fast service and simple nutritious food.

Take your child outside while waiting for the meal to be served.

Stop for meals at odd times to minimize the waiting.

Offer hungry toddlers some finger foods while waiting: individually wrapped slices of cheese, cold cereal in mini boxes, crackers, vacuum packed food cups (pudding, apple sauce, yogurt)

To ease the transition of coming home, prepare your house for your return. Make sure you have the essentials: diapers, baby food, clean clothes and tidy home. You can then relax, regroup and remember the memories of your travel.

"For years, my husband and I have advocated separate vacations. But the kids keep finding us."

~ Erma Bombeck