

Tips for Happier Car Journeys

Most of us spend more time in the car and other cramped spaces than we would like with our children. Keeping this time from becoming crazy is not just a tired parent's wish but could potentially be a life saver. Distractions from the backseat are highly risky and it's in everyone's best interests to have children who are happy passengers. Wouldn't it be great if car time was also creative time or at least a calmer time? Perhaps you feel the need to make better use of this daily grind.

Set Up the Safety Rules for Your Car

These might be...

- Seatbelts on before we go.
- Nothing goes out a window
- No fights and no frights
- The driver is the boss

It's your car and your rules! The whole safety of your family depends on your keeping the car a safe environment. This is more than just seatbelts. A distraction free ride is not just safe for you but also for other road users. If the rules aren't kept the consequences can be disastrous.

So invest in some training and teach your children to respect the special restrictions of the car environment. Don't be afraid to put your foot down! If the rules are being broken, pull over as soon as you can safely do so. Interrupt the journey to make the point. You can't drive if it's not safe. Do this as often as needed to make the point.

Number one priority is safety so that means everyone is harnessed or strapped in before you start the engine. A close second is a distraction free driving experience. If you are driver and caregiver all at once, driving must take priority. This of course means you can't respond immediately to every request. Children will have to learn to wait until you can safely provide what they need. Sometimes it is a matter of pulling over, if it just can't wait, or learning to wait and to do that without too much fuss. If you are going on longer journeys, try to set up children with activities and food and drinks that they can manage without assistance.

If you are driving other young children make sure they know the rules, too. Your children might help you with the simple listing of them. You might like to play the "Stop and Go" Game with them as well, because it's often with friends that the noise level really goes up.

Waiting Wonders

Waiting is not much fun! Whether its Doctor's waiting rooms or supermarket queues, having to wait is just part of life. As adults we can grit our teeth and tap our fingers in frustration. Children may feel like being a little more vocal about their unhappiness at the delay.

Of course avoiding whinging or full blown tantrums is at the top of our wish list, but what if we used the time to connect with our children in a positive way, and as a bonus keep building on their development of a variety of skills.

- If you can, schedule appointments away from nap times or when they are overtired
- Let your child know ahead of time if you are expecting waiting time
- Talk about the waiting time in a positive way so that you can plan to use it for fun
- Have a waiting survival kit (see the list for ideas)
- Praise good waiting behaviours whenever you notice they are quiet, sitting or standing in their own space, or playing well with toys or other activities
- Teach the concept of patience, point out examples of impatience.

The Purpose of Puzzles

Good educational Paper puzzles can help children work on their visual processing or perceptual skills and problem solving skills, as well as pass the time.

You can find these types of puzzles in all sorts of places from cheap Activity books to specialised electronic games.

Or you might like to subscribe to this treasure trove of worksheets designed by an Occupational Therapist. There are over 1000 to pick from with well organised sections and three different levels of difficulty:

Please visit www.visuallearningforlife.com

- Spot the Difference - Visual Discrimination
- Find-a-Word - visual figure ground skills
- Hidden Pictures - visual figure ground skills
- Dot to Dot - eye hand co-ordination, visual closure, pencil control
- Mazes - pencil control, problem solving
- Tracing - pencil control, direction following
- Match the object to the shadow - visual form constancy
- Cross words - word building skills, spatial relationships
- Draw in the grid - copying skills
- Rebus puzzles - naming first letter sound

- Secret Code - working memory
- Sequence solving - problem solving
- Overlapping pictures - visual figure ground

Supermarket Survival

There is no doubt that grocery shopping can be slower and more stressful with children in tow. Studies show that it is often more expensive as well! Isn't it great when you can just whiz around with just the shopping list for company!

However, school aged children can get a lot out of the shopping experience. As with most household tasks training can pay big rewards, both short and long term. In the short term the training process can help your child develop a basketful of academic and physical skills. In the long term the life skills you've passed down will guide them as future adults.

So next time you are off to the shops, see the experience as a vital training time.

Here's just some of the skills shopping can develop:

- Money Skills – discover how much different items cost
- Advanced Comparison skills- Higher versus Lower Prices, Best value etc
- Number skills- identifying numbers, counting,
- Muscle tone- carrying bags and heavy items e.g. Milk or Juice Cartons
- Reading skills- recognition of letters, words and logos
- Visual Discrimination e.g. which apple looks better
- Visual Figure Ground- looking for items against a busy background
- Food and nutrition knowledge- teach how to tell if fruit is ripe, Look at all the different types of vegetables.
- Memory Aids – using a shopping list
- Instruction following- Can you remember and do two instructions?
- Impulse control- learning not to touch everything that they see
- Careful handling- teach how to carry items safely and how to pack things safely
- Language concepts when packing items- heavy (potatoes); fragile (eggs) ; soft (bread)
- Language concepts for directions- in, on, under, behind, over.

Survival Tips

- Avoid shopping when hungry or thirsty
- Have a list to speed up the process and avoid impulse buys
- Allow for children to make choices where appropriate for items on your list
- Establish what your expectations are for your children and teach them as rules
- Expect your children to help according to their age, the busier they are the less chance to get bored or to misbehave
- Teach children to be safe around shopping trolleys- walk behind or beside them
- Think carefully about allowing excessive special treats
- Set Limits to asking for things. E.g. you may ask for only one extra item. If you ask for a second one, you will have to put the first one back.

Resources

Car Survival Kit - Long Journeys

- Snacks and drinks
- Baby wipes and tissues
- Wind Up crayons and paper
- Puzzle books and colouring In pages
- Creative fun materials eg kitchen foil, pipe cleaners, Wikki Stix
- Stickers for handing out for great behaviour

Waiting Survival Kit

- Snacks, water
- Fiddle toys - stretchy toys, squeezey toys, Wikki Stix, anything small and quiet to play with
- Pencil case with pens and crayons
- Puzzle books or colouring books appropriate to their age and interest
- Scrap paper or sketch pad
- Clipboard surface to draw on
- Game ideas