

Counseling Corner

Taking The Stress Out of Family Driving Vacations

from the American Counseling Association

Ah yes, there's nothing quite as enjoyable as a hot summer's day, a long distance drive in front of you, and a backseat containing one or more complaining children. Okay, maybe not enjoyable at all.

But such trips don't have to be stressful, unpleasant experiences. It's relatively easy to overcome the boredom that triggers those backseat passengers' complaints.

Start with entertainment to fill up the hours. For young children think books, games, puzzles or favorite toys. Fill a basket with a variety of items matching their interests, then hand them out one at time, providing something new when the previous one has done its duty. Include a couple of unexpected surprises, like a new book or colored markers.

Today's variety of electronic choices, from tablet computers to portable DVD and MP3 players, makes it easy to offer music and movie choices that can fill up hours. But don't forget to include ear buds so Mom and Dad can preserve their sanity and hearing while the backseat occupants rock out.

You probably also want the kids to experience the trip, not just disappear into an electronic coma. Try sitting them down before the trip with a map where they can mark the route and search the Internet for interesting attractions along the way. Let them track your trip progress on the map, and perhaps suggest places to stop and explore.

Planning on stopping every now and then is an important element in holding down stress levels and family tempers during a long car trip. Short breaks where everyone can get out, stretch and blow off steam may add a little time to the trip, but will also make it much more pleasant.

Most important, of course, is making sure that a traveling family is a well-fed family. A car full of hungry kids is a car full of unhappy kids. Try to stick to healthy snacks, avoiding high-sugar foods that tend to wire most children, and have a cooler with drinks. Remember that kids often eat and snack on a much more frequent schedule than their parents, so plan food stops and breaks accordingly.

Vacation trips by car, especially in this era of sky-high airline ticket prices, are often a family necessity, but don't have to be a family problem. Plan a bit and you can make the journey, not just the destination, part of your vacation fun.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at counseling.org

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398 words