



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Renee Klaassen

Stay sane when travelling with kids

The thought of travelling with children can cause some parents to reconsider their travel plans, but there are some practical, easy ways you can make the trip enjoyable for the children and the parents and keep your sanity in the process!

Family holidays are amongst my most treasured childhood memories. I remember trips to Lakes Entrance, our flappy red tent and running free amongst trees leading into the sea. Although my memories are happy, my mother often reflects that these holidays were quite stressful for her – but I never would have guessed; they must have been well prepared!

In order to ensure your children have happy memories and you reduce your stress, here are a few things you can do to remain sane these holidays when travelling with your kids.

Prepare yourself mentally before you leave

Parents should begin to use a Mindfulness technique at least a week before departure such as this Mindful Breathing exercise.

MINDFUL BREATHING

Research shows that even five minutes of relaxation per day has a cumulative, beneficial effect.

- ▶ Come into the present moment
- ▶ Accept any unwanted feelings without judgment
- ▶ Focus on the breath, feel it go in and go out of your body until you sense calm
- ▶ Ground yourself by feeling your feet on the ground or noticing your posture
- ▶ Return to present moment.

Prepare Mindfulness activities to relieve boredom and for 'mental time-out'

MINDFUL ACTIVITY 1 Bring craft along to do in the car, simple wool and icy-pole sticks create a gods eye. Craft activities require your full attention to the present moment and therefore distract away from both boredom and anxiety provoking thoughts. Make great mementos too!

MINDFUL ACTIVITY 2 Mindful colouring books are becoming well known and feature detailed images that provide opportunity for children and grown-ups alike to unwind and focus on creativity. Your brain cannot be stressed and in creative flow at the same time.

MINDFUL ACTIVITY 3 Liana Taylor, Mindfulness coach, advocates creating a Mindfulness Breathing Space. Do it in the car as you're driving or pull over. Ask children to close their eyes and take a deep breath. Ask them to begin the activity by scanning their body from the very tip of their head down through their face, neck, chest, tummy, legs and finally feet. Have them notice whether there are any places in their body that feels 'uncomfortable' or 'tingly'.

more on page 2



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Suggest that they visualise the feeling as an object (a lumpy ball or prickly blob), then have them put the object into a bubble. Now open the window of the car and blow the bubble (containing the feeling) off into the wind!

Be prepared to listen

What's a holiday without the odd tantrum or bickering with a sibling? Quickly curb the situation using emotion coaching:

- 1 Encourage your child to **tell what happened**. "I pinched her because she grabbed my stuff".
- 2 **Listen**, focusing mainly on the child's **emotions**. (His tone is angry).
- 3 **Name the emotion** for them "you're feeling angry because your sister grabbed your stuff?".
- 4 Allow the child to **confirm the emotion** (did you get it right?) "Yeah I'm angry at her".
- 5 **Affirm the emotion**, model that it is ok to have difficult feelings, "Well maybe I would be feeling angry too if someone took my things".
- 6 Then without solving the problem – **ask them what they think they could do about their feeling/ the problem**. "What do you think you could do instead of reacting by pinching her?".
- 7 Wait for a response and guide towards a solution within limits (I could ask her to stop, I could tell you what she did but being aggressive is not an option).

An opportunity for reflection

Sometimes stories and issues arise about the year in retrospect, for example your child might recall a time she did not get along with some friends and mentions, during the trip, that she remembers it as a very unhappy time.

- **Listen** to the story and ask the child how the situation was handled by both her and also other students or adults involved.
- **Reflect** on positive ways in which the situation was handled and if not handled well, how it could have been dealt with.
- Now have her **re-tell the story** including the positive aspects. Creating an alternative narrative teaches her the skill of reflection and helps her to find evidence of positive outcomes, it teaches resilience and self-confidence.

Prepare to have fun - "We're here!"

Finally you arrive at the destination but the problems aren't over for some parents. After sitting for a long time kids bodies are ready to be used so you need to find a place where they can run or burn off some of that pent-up energy. Depending on your environment, you may need to set boundaries for this activity to take place safely and without affecting other travellers. Rather than quash the child set boundaries and expect them to adhere to those boundaries.

Finally, stay sane by remembering that holidays which end with happy memories begin with (mental) preparation!



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