
Minimizing the Impact of ‘Holiday Travel Stress’ on Your Children

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It’s the end of the year.
The Holidays are here.
They embrace us all
With warm love and ~~cheer~~. ***Stress!***

...A disappointing ending to a poem which began on such a happy note. Certainly, the Holidays shouldn’t feel this way. But for many American families, the Holidays bring about more stress than any other time of the year. Although financial problems and finding time to shop in lieu of a busy work schedule may be stress-producers, traveling is often the biggest stressor of all.

Many Americans travel for an entire day (*sometimes longer*) in order to see the ones they love for the Holidays. Long lines, security checkpoints, juggling heavy clumsy luggage and keeping the kids safe and entertained can lead any parent to feel overwhelmed. Unfortunately, our children pick up on our stress and, in turn, become quite stressed-out themselves. For this reason, I offer the tips that follow in order to help you minimize the impact of ‘Holiday Travel Stress’ on your children. In order to make these tips easier to remember, I have used the acronym, “GIFT.”

Get Prepared: “*Stressed out parents create stressed out kids.*”

1. Preparation goes a long way in decreasing Holiday Travel Stress. Having only to look in one place to find your travel information makes traveling much easier. Take the time to develop an itinerary. Make sure to put all of your flight and rental information on it as well as your reservation numbers. When using online travel agencies, you can usually download an itinerary as a part of your reservation. In addition, be sure to put all of the necessary personal identification (*passports if needed*) together in a safe place with your itinerary. Having this information readily available will decrease your need to frantically search for it later. Remember that the calmer you are, the calmer your children will be.
2. Pack ahead of time. Saving these things for the last minute and rushing to get ready will only add to your stress as you worry about “what you forgot.” If you need to purchase things before you leave for your trip, make a list and get these items ‘days’ before you leave. Many travelers report remembering items that they had forgotten to

purchase only after returning from the store. Knowing that there is enough time to return to the store allows you to avoid potential panic.

3. Make sure to leave your home with plenty of time to get where you need to go. You can never anticipate accidents or other obstacles that prevent you from getting to places on time. Leaving early will help to allay any worries you may have regarding missing a flight or train. As an added benefit, it may also allow you extra time at the airport to grab a magazine or a cup of hot chocolate with your children before departing.

4. Sometimes “shipping” your luggage is far less stressful than carrying it onto a plane or checking at the counter. Although shipping charges can climb, depending on what you are bringing, having to deal with several pieces of your luggage while watching and caring for your children can feel overwhelming.

Invest in Security: “*Yelling at your children to stay close to you in the airport will only add to their stress.*” Investing in security will give you the peace of mind you need to make it a stress free trip for your children.

1. Educate your children on the need to stay close before you leave home. Set aside a decent amount of time to have this discussion so that you can get their input and thoughts on the issue as well. It is important that you present the message in a way that doesn’t frighten them but educates them on the need to stay close in crowds in order to avoid getting lost or separated.

2. Let your children know who to go to for help in the event that they do get separated. In an airport or train station, security guards are usually stationed everywhere. Ticketing counters are also a good place for children to go when separated from their parents. Let your children know that, if they do get separated, the separation is “only temporary” and that you will not forget about them.

3. Printing out a card for your children with your cellular phone number on it is a good idea for an added sense of security. In some cases, putting it around your children’s necks with the help of a lanyard will help to make sure it’s not lost. In the event that your children become lost, calling you and giving you a gate number will make it easy to find them. It may be a good idea to leave your children’s names off of this card. Placing your children’s names on the card will make it easier for a stranger to act as if they know your children by calling them by their first name. If you forget to take this step, simply writing your cellular phone number on their hands will do the trick as well.

Furnish Entertainment: “*A bored child is a stressed child.*” Keeping your kids busy will help to pass the time as well as keep them happy and stress-free.

1. Invest in a movie player. iPods and other MP3 players are much smaller and convenient to carry as they can usually fit into your children’s pockets. Although bulkier, portable DVD players are usually less expensive. Either way, having your children watch a movie will certainly be a stress-reducer because it will allow for longer flights to

seem shorter. In addition, you and your spouse will enjoy a less stressful flight as you will have less of a need to be on “active duty” while on the plane or train.

2. Cards, puzzles and reading materials are also good for keeping your children busy and stress-free while traveling. Many children become bored easily on long trips. Without having something to do, children may become stressed-out or other find things to do that elevate your level of stress (*like bickering and fighting with each other – sound familiar?*).

Take Time to Enjoy: “*Parents who dislike traveling create kids who dislike traveling.*”

If you’re going to travel, enjoy it! Enjoying your time with your family will allow them to enjoy their time while traveling.

1. Trips should be enjoyed. Present the trip to your children that way. Avoid saying things to your spouse like, “I hate traveling” or, “When are your parents ever going to come our way.” These statements lead to stress on the part of your children because they indicate that ‘you’ are not happy. Children become stressed-out around disgruntled parents.

2. Plan layovers to last at least 2 hours whenever possible. Traveling can be stressful enough, especially when worrying about missing a connector flight. Longer layovers minimize chances that connector flights will be missed due to flight delays. In addition, stopping at a restaurant in the airport and being able to sit for a meal will allow you and your family to enjoy some quality time together.

3. No matter what the reason, avoid arguing with your spouse in front of the children. This is another big stress-elevator for children.

4. Point out cooperative behavior on the part of your children. You may even choose to reward your children’s “good behavior.” Know that you are happy with your children will go a long way towards decreasing stress they may be feeling. In addition, more time spent focusing on the positives means less time spent dealing with the negatives (Negatives are stress-producers).

Holiday traveling is stressful. There is no way around it. But one of our biggest jobs as a parent is to shield our children from “our” stress. Following the suggestions that I have laid out above will help you to minimize the impact of Holiday Travel Stress on your children.
