

Are We There Yet?

The challenges of driving with children...

How often does it happen? You start driving along on an exciting adventure, and before you even leave your neighborhood, one of the kids chimes in with the question, "Are we there yet?" Or, if they are not asking that, they are impersonating Houdini by skillfully maneuvering out of the car seat with fine motor skills beyond their appropriate developmental stage. Whether you are the parent of an only child or the driver of a busload of children, you have to manage the challenges of transportation.

Kids require that we play many roles, especially when we are driving. We are chauffeur, entertainer, and tour guide. To the complaints of "I'm hungry" we play the role of waiter. When conflict arises, we become the police officers. Sometimes we're too late and the conflict leads to an injury, so now we are nurses. We need to be contortionists to manage all of our jobs at the wheel. With all of this going on, some of us, during our not-so-proud moments, resort to lollipops, DVD players or "Sure you can play with my cell phone." But what else should we do?

The key is preparation. First, make sure the vehicle is ready to go...avoid at all costs that stop for gas with a carload of preschoolers. Get good directions and review them ahead of time. Make the rules for the children and expectations of the trip clear from the start. If you are a professional driver, post your rules at the front of your bus or van. For example, "Stay in your seat" or "Use inside voices." Establish rewards for the children who comply, such as "you get to choose the music on Friday!" While driving your own children, you might say, "In 1 hour we will be at Nana's. You may only ask me 3 times 'are we there yet?'" In all situations, make sure that the children go to the bathroom before entering the vehicle, otherwise you will hear "I gotta...", well, you know what you will hear.

Now we're on the way. "I want this song." "The sun is in my eyes." "I dropped my book." The best response is to be direct and consistent. If you let a child dictate the music selection, how will you find a selection method that is fair to all? And will you be willing to listen to Elmo's Song ten times consecutively? If you stop once

to pick up the book, will you do it the next time, and the time after that? Make each decision carefully, as children remember.

Some simple strategies might include connecting a favorite toy to the car seat with links or clips. Jointly decide what CD or radio station you will listen to throughout the trip before you begin the journey and stick to it. When possible, plan the trip when the child is most likely to be comfortable in the car. Be prepared to lead some games, such as I Spy, in which you look for a circle, for example. Or the Alphabet Game, where you look for each letter on signs or license plates. To fulfill your role of entertainer, you might want to visit www.bussongs.com in order to recall some of the old standbys.

Recent studies suggest that talking on a cell phone while driving could be distracting. I wonder if those researchers have ever transported children. Now that takes distraction to a different level altogether.

