

Learning on the Go Traveling

Are we there yet? Use the time **in the car** to enhance your child's natural curiosity — find ways to interact and connect with your child.

Connect

Rather than finding toys to amuse and distract your child, use driving time to connect and enjoy being together.

“As a parent (and as a teacher) I would think of yourself as the child's greatest play thing. Your voice, your face, the things you do, and your actions are the things that intrigue them most. They have a natural curiosity for the things humans do. The thing to remember is that you and your time are the most valuable things to a child.”

*Patricia K. Kuhl, PhD
Professor of Speech and Hearing Sciences,
Co-Director, Institute for Learning and Brain
Sciences, University of Washington*

Watch and listen

What interests your child on car trips? Is it looking for signs that you are almost home or it is talking while you are together? Is it repeating new or silly words or sounds? Is it saying nursery rhymes, singing or watching for when the traffic lights change?

Extend

For your baby

- › Use car travel as a time to sing. Play a tape or CD or sing songs you know or love. You can also make up songs about what you are seeing along the road or sing along with the radio. Singing about everyday activities helps children enjoy the sounds of language, and helps babies begin to associate words with good experiences. Singing also creates a sense of togetherness.

For your toddler

- › If your toddler likes trucks, look for trucks as you drive along and see who can yell out “truck” first. Or listen to what your toddler says and repeat their words, adding new words or rhyming with words he or she says. These games help children learn to watch carefully and to categorize.

For your preschooler

- › Use car time to talk about your child's day. Ask specific questions (“Did you draw in preschool?” or “Did you eat a cheese sandwich?”) rather than general ones (“How was your day?”) because they are easier for young children to answer. Help your child talk about past experiences to enhance memory.
- › Talk with your child about where you are going in the future (“We are going to the market on the way home”) to help him or her develop thinking and planning skills.

“Memory is at the center of the cognitive universe. Every other kind of cognitive function depends on memory. Memory is bringing an experience that you've had in the world into mind. Memory is extremely important to learning because if you cannot remember, you can't acquire new abilities. Without memory you cannot store the products of learning.”

*Patricia J. Bauer, PhD
Professor of Child Development, Institute of Child
Development, University of Minnesota*

Learning on the Go Traveling

Riding public transit exposes your child to different people and new things. Use this time to heighten your child's sense of adventure.

Connect

Traveling on public transportation, especially if it crowded, can feel overwhelming to a young child, but it can also be an adventure. Encourage your child focus on travel as an adventure.

Watch and listen

How does your child react to the bus or subway? Help put words to your child's feelings, which will help your child feel known and understood. Notice how your child reacts to other people, sounds, sights, escalators, doors opening and closing or other things you see, feel and hear.

“Stress happens when there is a challenge that matters to you and you don't have the resources to manage it, with a secure relationship you have your resources.”

*Megan R. Gunnar, PhD
Distinguished McKnight University Professor
Institute of Child Development
University of Minnesota*

Extend

For your baby

- › Follow your baby's gaze while you travel and say aloud what you think he or she may be focusing on: “See the baby across from us” or “It is very noisy on the bus.”

For your toddler

- › Imagine what your child is feeling and try to see the experience through his or her eyes. Is she or he feeling overwhelmed or excited? Let your child help you by putting the fare in the fare box, asking the driver for a transfer or signaling the driver to stop. This helps develop a sense of confidence and mastery.

For your preschooler

- › Talk with your child about the last time you went on the bus or subway or what interests him or her about where you are going and what you will do when you get there. This will give your child a greater sense of control over his or her experiences and will help build memory and planning skills.
- › Make up special games on a bus or subway, such as counting the stops until you arrive. This helps children understand where they are going, and creates special fun routines or traditions that are always remembered, making the world feel predictable and safe.

Learning on the Go Traveling

Taking your child **on a walk** is not only good exercise, but also allows him or her to experience nature and learn about the outdoors.

Connect

Taking a walk is a wonderful physical activity for you and your child, plus it can also be a special time together. Focus on the present moment and being with your child, not on all of the things you have to do when you get back.

Watch and listen

Look at the walk through your child's eyes. How might a bug or a big crack in the sidewalk look to your child? What sounds do cars or birds make? Is the sun shining? Is it cloudy, warm or cold?

“Young children, like little scientists, have a hypothesis to begin with, but then they go out and make predictions and even do mini-experiments... and the experiments cause the children to change their minds — their hypothesis.”

*Andrew N. Meltzoff, PhD
Job and Gertrud Tamaki Endowed Chair,
Professor of Psychology
Co-Director, Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences
University of Washington*

Extend

For your baby

- › Name things that your baby looks at or is interested in — from street and business signs, to animals, flowers, bugs, cars, trucks, people or other sights.
- › Take time to let your baby watch things until his or her interest shifts. Notice how intently your baby studies things.

For your toddler

- › If your toddler likes to run and jump and practice moving around, make games of doing this.
- › Help your child learn to be safe by stopping at corners and driveways and showing him or her how to look both ways for cars.

For your preschooler

- › Ask questions about what you see on your walk that seems to interest your child. These questions can include the past, present and future. For example, if you and your preschooler see a dog, ask if he or she remembers seeing that dog before, what the dog is doing, or what they think the dog might do if the dog were bigger or smaller, or faster or slower.
- › Make up rhymes or sing marches as your walk. Try walking and singing or chanting fast, then slow.