

Reduce Family Travel Holiday Stress this Season

The holiday season is well underway. I just returned from Thanksgiving with friends and family in my home state of Wisconsin. Seeing your family during the holidays can be both a blessing and a curse. The 10 hour drive to get home was anything but fun, and the short flight is nice, but airports, delays and baggage requirements can be enough to start your holiday off on the wrong foot.

On my flight back I was in line behind a mother and her three children. I could tell by the look on her face that her Thanksgiving at grandma's house had been a tiring experience and the process of standing in line, checking baggage, and running through security was not the best end to what may have been a good holiday. Travel stress is unavoidable during the next month. Use the tips below to be prepared as you travel both near and far to visit friends and family this holiday season.

Things to do before you go. **Make your trip a family affair.** While I know it is fun to surprise the kids with a trip to grandma's house or a friends in a neighboring town your children, especially young teens, are more likely to be invested in the trip. In addition you can provide them with small tasks so they can contribute to your trips too, like finding a movie theater near your destination or planning a restaurant stop on your route there.

Share the details. As a child I remember never knowing what was happening next, maybe that was because my parents didn't have a plan. However if you do have a plan let your children know what to expect while they are gone. Travel stress in children, and adults too, can be reduced if everyone knows what to expect each day. If at any time during your trip you feel that your child will be put into a new and potential scary situation, like their first time through airport security, make them aware of what will happen as best you can. Have an airport boarding practice session or read books related to the subject.

Know the level of child friendliness at your final destination. If your grandma's home is anything like mine it is full of knickknacks, antiques and other items that to this day I am still not allowed to touch. It also means that there are very few toys, DVDs or things for children to do when they come to visit. If you can, talk to others about helping to make their homes child ready and safe. If this is an unattainable goal survey the room when you arrive and bring a childproofing kit with you and do the best you can with the circumstances you are given. Let your children pack their own bag of toys, travel games, books and so on. But bring a special surprise or two to pull out when they start getting bored - maybe a toy they haven't seen in a while or a small gift you bought just for the trip.

Consider what you pack and how you pack. As a child I remember being crammed into my grandparents and friends home, sometimes with little room to walk around my suitcase because of an inflatable bed or sleeping bags on the floor. Keep your suitcases organized by separating clothing in clear zip-top bags and labeling them with names and contents, such as Blake's socks and Megan's dresses. This makes it easier to quickly find what you need, and you can store dirty clothing in them on the way back. If you expect to be bringing back more than you started with, stash an extra duffle bag in your suitcase so you'll be able to haul your loot home. Also bring snacks. Having a supply of good travel foods with you is a great way to head off a tantrum from

a hungry child, especially if they don't like the food on the plane or at a party you are going to.

Remember the importance of safety. If you are driving your car take it in for a quick inspection (oil, antifreeze, brakes and tires) before you leave. Check the weather forecast a few days ahead to see whether you'll need extra supplies or travel time. Just in case, pull together some emergency essentials, including a small shovel, blankets, a flashlight and bottled water. As we know in Missouri the weather can change even if you are only driving from one end of town to the other. If you are flying check on baggage allowances and TSA regulations. Although you may see airport security as over the top remember that your safety is their number one concern.

Finally don't overdo it. Even though you want to see every aunt, uncle, cousin, and friend be sure to keep your entire family in mind and make your visits realistic. When you're away from home, it's tempting to cram in as much fun as you possibly can. But too many people, parties and activities can overload your child. Instead, focus on one big outing each day and schedule in plenty of downtime. This way your kids - and you - will avoid burnout and you will return from the trip having enjoyed your time, and looking forward to another trip in the future. Too often we try to do so much and then when it is all done we regret decisions that were made and swear that we will never do it again. The woman and her two children in front of me in line at the airport commented that they would never fly to see grandma again. My eaves dropping on their conversation revealed that they had not planned well. They were hit with unexpected baggage charges, had too much crammed into one four day trip and did not bring enough for the kids to do while admiring grandma's antiques.

Of course even if you plan in advance and do all you can to avoid it holiday travel stress will happen. Hopefully you can reduce the amount of stress and enjoy your time with family and friends. For more information on youth development related topics please contact the University of Missouri Extension Office in Henry County at 660-885-5556.

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