

FACT SHEET

Travelling for Holidays



With the Easter and School Holidays approaching, and most of us preparing for a break, we may begin to prepare to go on holiday. Travelling with children can be challenging at times, changes in routine, unfamiliar places and the logistics of moving a family can create stress for both children and adults.

Before you go: Simple planning to reduce stress

- Plan realistic travel segments. For long car trips, schedule regular stops (short play and stretch breaks) to reduce restlessness and motion discomfort. For flights, where possible select travel times close to a child's sleep routine and allow extra time at the airport to avoid rushing.
- Make a child a "trip bag": comfort item (soft toy/blanket), spare clothes, wipes, favourite snack items, water bottle, small quiet activities (sticker books, simple puzzles, fidget/sensory toys, colouring pages).
- For older children who enjoy music, or movies, packing headphones and a fully charged device with pre-downloaded shows, if you use screens. Keep medicines and important documents in an easily reachable carry bag.
- Talk about the trip with your child in simple terms. Tell them where you're going, how you'll travel, and what will happen next. Visual schedules or a simple timeline (we'll drive two hours, stop for lunch, then half an hour of play") help children to feel more secure.



Car travel: Safety and comfort

- Child restraint rules and correct installation matter. Use an approved, age and size appropriate restraint: rear-facing infants as long as possible, properly fitted forward-facing harness seat for toddlers and forward to booster transition only when the seat markers are exceeded. Follow state-road safety guidance and manufacturer instructions.
- Reduce boredom and motion irritation: short, varied activities; audiobooks or sing-along playlists; and a mix of quiet (colouring) and interactive (I-spy) games. Rotate activities to keep interest high. Limit prolonged screen time and reserve it for when you need a long stretch of calm.
- Plan stops that allow children to move energetically. A playground or short walk helps reset mood and reduces irritability in the car. Always check food/fuel/phone coverage for remote stretches.



Air travel: Practical checks and comfort

- Prepare for ear pressure ascent/descent: encourage swallowing, breastfeed, bottle, dummy or sips of water. Explain to older children why popping, chewing or swallowing helps. Check your airline's rules for bringing approved child seats or bassinets onboard.
- Keep carry-on organised: essential meds, spare clothes, comfort objects snacks (make sure you pack enough snacks and drinks to last the length of the flight) and entertainment. Arrive at the airport early to reduce stress from rushing to manage security checks calmly.

Linking to the National Quality Standards (NQS)

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Planning travel segments, packing medicines, using correct car restraints, and managing ear pressure during flights demonstrates proactive risk management and protects children's physical wellbeing.

Quality Area 5: Relationships and emotional security

Supporting routines, validating feelings, giving choices, and maintain comforting rituals ensures children feel secure, valued, and supported emotionally while facing unfamiliar environments.

Children's emotional response: What you may see?

- Normal reactions: excitement, clinginess, sleep disruption, irritability or brief separation worries are common when routine changes or when children face unfamiliar environments. There are normal developmental responses and usually ease with reassurance and predictable routine.
- Signs of stress to watch for: persistent withdrawal, extreme clinginess, refusal to eat or sleep over several days, or ongoing intense distress. If these continue after returning home or stop you from functioning, consider speaking with a child health or development professional.

How parents can support emotional wellbeing on a trip:

- Keep comforting rituals where possible (familiar bedtime story, nightlight, a favourite toothbrush, same pyjamas). Predictability at key moments, bedtimes, and mealtimes help children to feel secure.
- Validate feelings: name emotions ("you seem tired/sad/excited") and offer simple calm assurances. Offer small choices to give children a sense of control (choice of two snacks, or which activity to do during the next stop, or a task to do that gives them a sense of responsibility).
- Prepare children socially: share photos of the accommodation or destination beforehand and involve them in simple packing tasks so the trip feels like a joint project. For children who struggle with separations or new places, brief practice stays or visits to new environments before a longer trip can help build confidence.

Communication & behaviour strategies:

Use short, calm instructions and praise specific behaviours ("thanks for helping put your shoes on, that's really helpful"). Keep expectations realistic for the child's age and energy level. Use distraction and games for low-level meltdowns, calming routines for higher stress.

Sources;

Raising Children Network – Travelling with kids: plane, bus or train and related family travel pages (RaisingChildren.net.au)

Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) – Travelling with children guidance (updated 4 Dec 2023)

ACECQA – Excursions Guidelines & Guide to the National Quality Framework (ACECQA excursions guidance, 2021)

Children's Health Queensland – Helping your child: Separation anxiety (parent factsheet, 2024)