

## Flying with Young Children

The recent story of the airplane passenger slapping a young mom's crying toddler is every parent's worst nightmare! But even without that painful drama, flying with babies or young children can be stressful for everyone involved. What can parents do to be prepared for those fussy moments? And how can fellow passengers help ease the stress for both parents and children?

### I. Developmental issues that make travel challenging for children

- Restlessness and higher need for physical activity and more frequent snacks & potty breaks
- Poorly developed sense of time (Are we there yet?)
- Over-excitement and inflated expectations that can lead to irritability and disappointment
- Greater vulnerability to severe ear pain during pressure changes

### II. Tips for parents

- Allow child to burn off energy before boarding flight  
*Arrive at airport early enough to let child have time to walk around and explore*
- Bring something for child to suck or chew during take-off & landing (to ease ear pressure)
- Have a bag of surprises to last through the flight  
*This can include small treats, art supplies, a new book or CD or toy*
- Set clear expectations in advance and notice good behavior frequently (good advice in any parenting situation)

### III. Tips for fellow passengers

- Offer to help the parents at security or when boarding  
*For example, offer to carry some of the paraphernalia young kids often require, help put bags or coats in the overhead bin or simply ask what would be helpful*
- If child seems open to it, interact playfully  
*It's amazing how an impromptu game of peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake or itsy-bitsy spider can break the tension and distract a young child. Or draw silly faces on a napkin or crumple a piece of notebook paper and toss it in the air.*
- Offer words of support and encouragement to the parent  
*It can go a long way to simply acknowledge how hard it can be to travel with young children (and how uncomfortable it can be for the children). When a parent worries that their child's fussiness is bothering other passengers, the parent's stress goes up and, in turn, the child feels even more upset. So a gesture of empathy and support can help everyone involved.*