

Children and Flying Fears

When it comes to traveling, it is common for children to have fears. Children might be afraid of high places and not want to go over bridges, or they might find tunnels to be frightening because they are dark and enclosed. Being in an airplane can also be scary for children. Some children are more fearful about flying now than in the past because they are aware that airplanes have been targeted by terrorists. Using the tips below, you can help relieve your child's fears and make air travel less scary.

Addressing Safety Concerns

What if your child is concerned that the plane will crash or that terrorists will be on the plane?

Remain calm and reassuring while discussing your child's fears. Tell him or her that the grown-ups are working very hard to make flying safe. Explain that, just like there are pilots and flight attendants, there are airport workers and security personnel whose job every day is to make sure that everything is safe for passengers.

Security Screening

Airports screen all individuals, regardless of their age. Speak to your child about the screening process before you arrive at the airport so that he or she will not be surprised and alarmed. Explain that the security officers are making sure that everything that people bring onto the plane is safe. Let your child know that you may be asked to remove jackets and shoes, and place them on the X-ray belt. Consider having your child wear shoes that are easy to take on and off, such as those with Velcro closures. Also make sure that your child knows that he or she will have to place his or her belongings, even a favorite doll or security blanket, on the belt that goes through the X-ray machine. Assure the child that the clothes and belongings will be returned to him or her after they come out of the other side of the machine.

What if you or your child is selected for extra screening?

Security personnel are not permitted to ask you to do anything that will separate you from your child. If you are selected for additional screening, your child may accompany you to the designated secondary screening area. If your child is selected for additional screening and appears anxious, provide reassurance that there is nothing to be concerned about as this is a normal procedure that happens at airports, and that you will be right there with him or her.

Restrictions on Your Luggage

Explain to your child you want to be very careful and make sure that everything inside of people's luggage is safe, and for this reason some things are not allowed in your bags. Avoid a stressful situation at the security screening area by adhering to restrictions. If you pack prohibited items in your carry-on luggage, it may upset your child to see your family's belongings, even items of no value, being confiscated or thrown away. Because airport security precautions change, it is a good idea to check online for current prohibitions and requirements before you leave for the airport. You can find a current list of air travel security measures at the website of the Transportation Security Administration: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtm>

Screening for Explosives

At some airports, if you are selected for additional screening, you may be asked to walk through a Trace Portal Machine, which detects traces of explosives. As you enter the machine, you will be asked to stand still for a few seconds while several bursts of air are released. A computerized voice indicates when you may exit the portal. Other airports use hand-held devices to look for traces of explosive materials.



Practical Tips for Making Air Travel Less Stressful

Before You Fly

To help your child to have a positive attitude towards flying, be enthusiastic about your coming trip during the days prior. Tell your child that traveling in an airplane can be exciting and fun, and that you are looking forward to the trip.

Arriving at the Airport

Leave yourself a lot of extra time. A long wait is preferable to a stressful race through the airport in order to not miss your flight. This stress may aggravate your child's fears and make him or her very reluctant to fly in the future.

Keep Your Child Busy

While waiting to board the plane, and during the flight, your child may become restless and irritable. Bring activities or a favorite snack for your child. Being engaged in an enjoyable activity will not only help occupy your child during long waits in the airport or on the plane, but will also help distract your child from any fears he or she may have. Be sure to verify that the food and activities that you intend to bring are allowed to be in your carry-on luggage and brought onto the plane.

Turbulence

Turbulence is a common occurrence that can be unnerving for adults and children alike. You can provide reassurance by remaining calm and comforting your child. You may wish to explain that, just like roads, the air can be bumpy too and that's why everyone's wears a seatbelt in an airplane, just like they do in cars.

Ear Aches

Changes in air pressure in the airplane cabin, due to changes in altitude, can affect children's and adults' eardrums and cause pain and discomfort. The small size of children's ear and nasal passages make children more vulnerable to having blocked passages, which can cause ear pain while flying. To prevent pressure from building up as your airplane changes altitude, help your child open passages by encouraging him or her to yawn frequently, drink plenty of decaffeinated fluids, chew gum, or suck on hard candy (if age appropriate). Using a nasal decongestant spray or pressure-equalizing ear plugs may also help. If your child does experience pain and becomes upset, let him or her know that this is a common part of flying and that it will get better in a couple of minutes. If your child has an ear infection, or has experienced prior ear pain when flying, consult your pediatrician before your scheduled flight.

Taking Off and Landing

Like turbulence, the taking off and landing of a plane may be scary for your child. Your calm demeanor will go a long way towards calming your child since your child learns how to react to a situation by taking clues from your behavior. If your child is agitated, ask your child what his or her concerns are and provide reassurance and explain how airplanes get up in the air or down to the ground. Consider giving your child a toy to play with, reading a story or playing a game together, in order to distract and comfort your child during take-off and landing.

Security Screening Instructions from the Transportation Security Administration:

At the X-Ray

- All carry-on baggage, including children's bags and items, must go through the X-ray machine.
- All child-related equipment that will fit through the X-ray machine must go through the X-ray machine.
- When you arrive at the checkpoint, collapse or fold your child-related equipment.
- If any of your child-related equipment does not fit through the X-ray machine, security officers will visually and physically inspect it.

The Walk-Through Metal Detector

- If your child can walk without your assistance, we recommend that you and your child walk through the metal detector separately.
- Remove babies and children from their strollers or infant carriers so that security officers can screen them individually.
- You may not pass the child to another person behind you or in front of you during this process.
- Do not pass your child to a security officer to hold.
- A security officer may ask for your help screening your child.

Remember to check <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtm> for the latest information about prohibitions and requirements.

