

Out and About with Kids

Many of us have noticed that when we go out for the day with babies and toddlers we need about the same amount of guff as we would need to pack for a week.

In this section we have tried to offer you tips on making it easier to shop and visit friends with small children in tow.

Many parents tell us that their friends are well past the age where they are comfortable with small children in their homes, and visiting can strain friendships when small children touch precious things and threaten the peace and calm of quiet households.

This information sheet contains advice about packing wisely, and amusing and managing children on the move.

Car travel with kids

You can buy little lap desks which are perfect for kids to do colouring or activities on when you are on the go. Use it in the car, the plane or even at home on the couch. Great to take on holidays as a sturdy surface for colouring, drawing and writing. Most also have elastic tabs in each corner to hold paper in place, which can be very handy!

Toys and activity centres that hang off the seat in front of the child can also really help amuse and settle small children from the time they start using a forward facing car seat. The often have a mirror in them which fascinate babies.

Portable DVD Players are now very fashionable and are great to keep kids occupied on a long journey. But you need to be wary that, while they might help keep your kids entertained on car trips, portable DVD players and their remote controls aren't toys. They may contain small parts that can come off, so always supervise when young children are around.

Visiting friends

The Special Bag. Taking things to amuse the kids is a great idea, so make sure you keep a bag for this purpose or for when you have to see a doctor. Keep interesting toys and activities in that bag which the children never get to touch at any other time except when you are out visiting. That way the novelty value of the those toys will keep them engaged for longer.

Portable High Chairs. There are a range of portable high chairs - the best are those that fold into your nappy bag and sit on any normal chair. They are an excellent way to corral a child while you have cuppa with friends who almost certainly won't have a high chair in their house!

Taking food and drink the kids can eat and is not messy is a very good plan - especially finger foods they can manage.

Visiting friends with small children can be quite a challenge, but with some careful packing and planning it can work so that you can visit without overtaxing your less child tolerant friends.

You can also make wonderful play mats with lots of pockets where you can keep things like farm animals, little cars, tiny people, dolls, trains and cards or dinosaurs. The pockets can have zips or Velcro and form "hills" on a landscape that you make by gluing or stitching coloured fabric onto your play mat.

It works well to make your mat green and put grey roads in, blue ponds, and other elements of the countryside. The children can get things out of the pockets and play with them on the mat when you are out and about.

Once again, as with the special outings toy bag, it works very well if this mat is only used when you are out and about. If you keep a range of things to interchange in the pockets, your child will really look forward to finding out what is hidden there. Most Op Shops sell small bags with lots of little figures and animals in them for around a dollar. Safety check them for choking hazards and then put the contents into the surprise pockets.

Pack everything you want easy access to on the road separately so you're not forced to dig around in your suitcase en route. Jackets and hats, for example, should be within easy reach. And keep basic supplies such as sunscreen and mosquito repellent in a separate bag so you can take advantage of opportunities for outdoor fun along the way.

Activities for kids on long trips

1. Surprise bags for longer trips with children 3 -5 years. Prepare ahead with paper bags of items to be given out every 25, 50 or 75 kilometres -- marked on a map with the location, it takes a little bit of preparation to do this, but it REALLY helps young children. In each bag put a wrapped item -- usually a small toy. Then in some of the surprise packages you can add juice or a snack, stickers and a piece of paper, photo, brochure, or something pertaining to the trip that you can talk about.

2. Travel Tickets. Use some coloured cardboard to cut out some "tickets" for your trip. Give your child a pre-counted bag of tickets. Every half hour (or every 30 km's) they can turn in one ticket to you. When their tickets are gone, the trip has ended! This really helps young children get an idea of how much time is left on the journey.

3. Drawing Boards. Such as Magna doodle, Etcha Sketch, and small white boards with dry erase markers.

4. Pipe Cleaners Pack. A new bag of multi coloured pipe cleaners and let their creativity run wild.

5. Sewing Cards. You can buy these or make your own by cutting out shapes from thin cardboard and using a hole puncher near the edge every inch or so. Then take a shoelace or a piece of yarn with some tape wrapped around one end and "sew" all the way around your shapes.

6. Colorforms. Pieces are made from thin plastic that sticks by static cling. These are also fun to stick on the windows of the car. Available online and in most toy stores.