

# Making Car Trips Fun



For some children, travelling in the car can be a challenging time. It is also a routine where you are not face to face with your child, so it can feel challenging to interact with them. However, there are ways to make this a time to engage with your child so that it is fun and enjoyable for both of you.

Being a parent means you need to be prepared for all sorts of events that arise each day. Sometimes this is possible other times, it's not.

## Before you go

**Be Safe.** It's important to be aware of keeping everyone safe when getting children into and out of the car, as well as while you are driving. There is a list of safety tips in the Appendix.

**Be prepared.** Keep the things your child might need for the trip within easy reach. Things such as snacks, water bottles, toys, books, and wipes.

**Be comfortable.** Consider those things that children need to make them feel safe and secure. These could include things such as:

- a preferred cuddly toy
- a security blanket.
- A special toy they like to hold that they may have been playing with or reading before leaving the house e.g., a doll or a book



**Communicate.** Communicate to your child what is happening and where you are going. You could use some visuals to help with this.



"First, in the car"

"then we'll go to the park"

**Sensory needs.** If you know your child gets anxious before leaving the house, if you have time, do something that you know is calming for your child e.g.:

- squeeze hugs or tickles
- songs
- jumps to the car

You can then communicate what is happening (see above visuals)



## In the car

### Choice and control

If your child can make a choice, give them a choice “would you like to sing songs or play with your toy in the car?”

You could have a few different pictures of things your child enjoys and they could pick from them to help your child choose. Encouraging the child to make a choice will distract them from being in the car and give them some control over what is happening.

#### Transport vehicles

- Treasure box-kept for the car containing preferred books on transport vehicles or vehicles for your child to hold with no loose or small parts.
- Visual board of your child’s favourite vehicles.
- Play “spot the car/bus/truck” (use colours if your child can recognise colour).
- Songs about riding in the car, bus or train. Some ideas for songs are: The Wheels on the Bus; I’ll Take You Riding in My car; The Train Song; Puffer Train; Up in the Air I Fly; Row, Row, Row Your Boat; Here is the Sea

#### Nursery rhymes and songs

- Which nursery rhymes are your child’s favourite? Learn the words and sing these; leave out words or make up silly words to hold your child’s interest and attention.
- Have a collection of these in your playlist so that your child can listen to these when in the car.
- Ideas for Nursery rhymes: Twinkle Twinkle; Incy Wincy Spider; Humpty Dumpty; etc.
- Songs about shapes and colours: The Rainbow song; The spot Song-you can sing about all the different shapes and add some funny ones in as well.

### Sensory needs

If your child is sensitive to light/glare, you can put a sunshade on the car windows, or use a towel over the window to protect from the sun.

**Ensure this isn’t blocking the driver’s view**

### Child’s interests

What is your child interested in? You can use this interest to focus on when in the car. Below are some ideas:

#### Dinosaurs

- Small bag or treasure box kept for the car with small dinosaur figures (Remember no loose or small parts).
- Sign “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” replacing animals with dinosaur names.
- Make up dinosaur sounds for different dinosaurs e.g., stegosaurus, T-Rex etc.
- Ideas for dinosaur songs: 10 Little Dinosaurs; We Are the Dinosaurs; Dinosaur Stomp; The Prehistoric Animal Brigade

#### Animals-farm/zoo/pets

- Treasure box with small animal figures (No loose or small parts).
- Visual board of the nursery rhyme jump or jiggle.
- Songs and rhymes about animals: Old MacDonald; Bingo; We’re All Going To the Zoo tomorrow; The Old Grey Cat; etc.

#### Numbers and letters

- Numbers to 10/20/50/100 visual board (depending on child’s ability).
- Alphabet visual board.
- Songs about letters and numbers: the alphabet song; “12345”; etc.

## Using your voice

You still want to engage with your child so will need to use your voice to do so more than when you are able to be face to face. Your voice is a tool to use when in the car as your child knows it so well.

- Make different sounds to engage your child e.g., favourite animal/dinosaur sounds, different vocalisations
- You can use your voice to whisper, this often encourages children to listen more closely
- Change your voice up when speaking e.g., use a croaky voice or high-pitched voice to gain child's attention and engage them.

## Do you need some resources?

- Ask your Start Strong Pathways Educator to help with this. They can help with making visuals and making a plan for this routine.
- Does your child have an OT? Let them know you are working on this routine. Check in with them about some calming strategies for your child or for other resources.
- Does your child have a SP? They can help you with visuals as well as other resources to engage your child during car trips.

## Travelling longer distances?

If you are travelling longer distances, you will need to plan for some stops. This will be a time where everyone can get out and get some fresh air and stretch. If your child is not mobile, a blanket or rug for them to roll around on would work.

See some tips from the Raising Children Network here:

[raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/family-management/family-travel-children-with-additional-needs](https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/family-life/family-management/family-travel-children-with-additional-needs)



## References

[raisingchildren.net.au/babies/family-life/holidays-travel/travel-with-children](https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/family-life/holidays-travel/travel-with-children)

[raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/safety/car-pedestrian-safety/car-safety#car-safety-seatbelts-nav-title](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/safety/car-pedestrian-safety/car-safety#car-safety-seatbelts-nav-title)

[roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/staying-safe/children/passengersafety.html](https://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/staying-safe/children/passengersafety.html)

## Appendix (safety)

- Children under seven years must use a child car seat that's the right size, correctly installed and adjusted to fit.
- **Children aged six months-four years must not sit in the front row of a vehicle** if the vehicle has two or more rows of seats. If the vehicle has only one row of seats, children can sit in the front row if they're using an appropriate child car seat.
- Rear-facing child car seats can't be used if there's a passenger airbag.
- **Always get your child in and out of the car on the kerbside, away from traffic.**
- **If you have a baby and a toddler, keep your toddler safe inside the car when you're getting your baby out.** Once you're all out of the car, hold hands with your child and together work out where cars could come from before you walk away from the car.
- **When you go back to your car, help your toddler in first, because your baby is less likely to move out of sight.**
- **Always hold small children's hands around roads.** Children need grown-up supervision around roads until they're at least 10 years old.
- **Always wear a seatbelt,** only driving when all seatbelts are done up.



- Ensure your **child always keeps arms, legs, and head inside the car** when it's moving or parked on the side of the road.
- **Activate childproof door locks** so your child can't get out when the car is moving or standing still. These locks are usually inside most car doors. Check your car's manual if you have one.
- **Restrain any pets travelling with you.** This protects not only your pet but also any passengers in your car.
- **When giving your child the opportunity to play with preferred toys, ensure there are no small, loose parts they might mouth and choke on.**
- Pull over to the side of the road **if your child needs attention**
- **Never leave your child unattended in a car.** On a hot day, the temperature inside a car can get to dangerously high levels and cause serious harm or even death to your child.
- Keeping children happy and entertained can help with safe driving.

