



THE FAMILY TREE

The “Friendly Airways” How to make flying as comfortable and safe as possible for your child

Gone are the days when arriving at the airport an hour before a flight allowed enough cushion for you to check in, enjoy a danish and some coffee, pick up a magazine and gum, and freshen up a bit before taking your seat on the plane. With the events of September 11 in the not-too-distant past, air travel as we knew it has become a lot more complicated. New regulations and increased security have certainly made flying trickier, especially when you’re traveling with small children.

Given these new concerns, we thought it appropriate to go straight to the source for some tips on flying with children. So we asked Judy Rowe, a 30-year veteran flight attendant with American Airlines, to share her best advice for ensuring that you and your children experience the safest and most comfortable air travel possible. Here are a few “inside” tips she passed along to The Family Tree:

Allow plenty of time to board your flight. With the new security measures, airlines are now asking that you arrive at least 1½ hours before your flight is scheduled to leave. You might also want to be at the gate 20 minutes ahead of time, as most carriers allow parents with small children to board before other passengers.

Prepare your children ahead of time for the airport’s security routine. Wherever you fly, you’re likely to find most airports differ quite a bit on such things as how busy they are or the type of scanning equipment they have on hand. While planning for your trip, check with the air carrier to familiarize yourself with the procedures in place at both ends.

Travelers will also discover security regulations vary from one city to the next. Some airports - particularly larger international hubs - still have armed National Guard troops stationed at security checkpoints, which can be unnerving even for adults. So to alleviate any fear or confusion your child may feel with some of these heightened security procedures, be sure to talk to them about what they can expect.

Lastly, just getting through the gate can take anywhere from a few minutes to

well over an hour, depending upon the time of day you travel (early morning is best) and number of people in line. Be sure to review with your child the importance of security checkpoint etiquette - move through quickly, and don't ask questions or make remarks that could be misunderstood by security personnel.

Pack everything your child will need to ensure his maximum safety and comfort. All airlines have rules governing the safety and security of children. During your flight, make sure your children are buckled securely into their seat belts at all times. The use of car seats has become an additional safety precaution for infants and small children over the past few years. Be sure to check the sticker on the side of your seat to make sure it's FAA-approved for air travel. And for those of you traveling with an infant, remember not to place them in a front carrier pack during takeoff or landing.

To help your young one - and *you* - truly enjoy the plane ride, be sure to pack plenty of comfort items- including snacks, as most airlines have done away with in-flight meals, except on longer flights. Also, bring something to alleviate ear-popping and other discomfort from changing air pressure during takeoff and landing. The idea is to give your child something to chew or suck that promotes frequent swallowing - bottles or pacifiers for infants and small toddlers; gum or dried fruit for older children. If you do bring drink containers on board, make sure they're pressurization-safe to avoid accidental leaking.

And, of course, don't forget the entertainment! While many flight attendants are parents as well, they are on board to ensure the safety and security of the passengers, not to entertain your children. (As Judy says, they are often too busy keeping up with adult passengers who act like children!) Therefore, include activities that are not only portable, but also entertaining for longer periods of time - such as coloring books, travel-sized or hand-held games, and simple craft kits (potholders, sewing cards, etc.).

Keep your children safely belted into their seats and out of the aisles. Never allow your kids to roam freely through the aisle of an airplane. This practice is not only unsafe for your child, but also for other passengers and your flight crew (who must have a clear path to move heavy food carts or address possible emergencies). Take note that for security reasons, older children are no longer allowed to play flight attendant or visit the cockpit. Also, always accompany your youngsters to bathroom breaks. Judy can recount more than one instance when a child has been accidentally locked into the lavatory, too scared to follow even the simplest directions for working the locks!

Try not to pass your own fears around air travel on to your children. According to Judy, parents sometimes pass their own flying anxieties on to their children, turning what could be a wonderful learning adventure into a frightful experience. As she says, older children generally love to fly. Imagine the excitement a 5-year-old must feel as he watches the houses grow smaller beneath him, or contemplates

the ease with which his plane climbs above the clouds. So instead of gripping the armrest and squeezing your eyes tightly shut, turn the flight into a learning experience for both of you. As you take off, make a game out of finding your neighborhood or some other obvious landmark. Or why not read about the latest airplane technology together, and then try to identify the steps as you take off and land?

If your child is flying without you (say to visit her dad or grandparents in another city), consult your air carrier ahead of time. Each airline has its own procedures for registering and monitoring “unaccompanied minors.” Be sure to discuss these rules when you make the reservation, and then brief your child on what to expect. For safety reasons, most carriers prefer that unaccompanied children travel on direct flights, alleviating the need to change planes in a busy airport along the way. (Direct flights may make stops, but everyone stays on the plane.) Clearly identify your youngster and her luggage by making visible name tags to pin to their clothing and attach to bags. Be sure to also include information about her final destination point, the name and relationship of the party meeting her there, and a list of emergency phone numbers, just in case. Have a safe, enjoyable summer - and happy flying!