

Flying With Children: Tips From An Airline Insider

Special thanks for this article go to Sharon, an American expat woman in France and a former flight attendant for two carriers in five countries over thirteen years.

Introduction

As expat mothers, you usually need to fly with your children. One of the worst mistakes to make when flying with children is to assume that the last time that you flew everything went great, so it will again. Also, how much your little one(s) have flown often has little or no impact on how it will go. Not too many kids have flown as much as mine have and I have stopped predicting whether they will have horns or halos during the flight, while children who have never been on a plane before can be complete angels. It is variable. The purpose of this article is to give you as much information as possible, to make flying with children as easy as possible for you. I hope it helps!

Sharon

Flying With Children Sections

1. Documentation
2. Reserving
3. Seating
4. Car Seats
5. Car Seat Alternatives
6. Car Seat Policies
7. Car Seat Placement in the Cabin
8. Upgrading
9. Special Meals
10. Low Cost Companies
11. Packing
12. Dressing for Flying
13. Preparing Children
14. Check-in
15. Getting and Accepting Help
16. Organizing Leaving and Arriving
17. Strollers/Pushchairs/Buggies
18. Getting Car Seats Through Airports

19. Baby Carriers
20. Security
21. Boarding
22. Installing the Car Seat
23. Ears and Altitude
24. Turbulence and Other Safety Issues
25. In-Flight Toys and Ways to Occupy Small Children
26. Electronic Items
27. Taking Care of Your Own Needs with Babies
28. Breastfeeding Tips
29. Bottle-feeding Tips
30. Exclusive Pumping Tips
31. Baby Food Tips
32. Pacifiers/Dummies
33. Diaper Changing Tips
34. Crying
35. Special Circumstances
36. Flying With a Newborn
37. Potty Training and Flying With The Recently/Almost Trained
38. Air Sickness
39. Sleeping Medications for Children
40. Unaccompanied Minors and Children Flying Solo
41. Disembarking
42. Exiting the Airport

Published with permission on ExpatWomen.com, December 2008

For future updates to Sharon's information, or to contact Sharon directly, please visit her Blog: <http://flyingwithchildren.blogspot.com/>

Sharon's Disclaimer: This article is not a legal document and cannot be used as proof of any of the laws or rules that I refer to throughout. Check the FAA websites, or other relevant agencies to confirm any statements that are made. I try to provide links where I can. Be aware, also, that airlines often have their own policies which might be stricter than their own government's laws. Most of the employees that you encounter do not have the power to change or make exceptions to any rule. They simply must follow them, even in cases where logic or safety is questionable.

1. Documentation

If you are at the stage of considering a journey, look into what documents you need for your child as soon as you can organize it. Obviously it's impossible to cover this subject thoroughly but make sure you have what you need. There are too many horror stories of families being turned away at the airport, if not prevented from booking in the first place.

For international travel, your child probably needs a passport. There are only a very few exceptions (i.e. within the E.U. and the new U.S passport card - good within a specific area). Many countries are switching from the system of putting children in their parents' passports to requiring every child to have his or her own. Also, because of the worldwide security situation, many countries which used to let nationals of neighboring countries visit without them are now requiring passports. For domestic U.S. travel, you will need a certified copy of the child's birth certificate. If you prefer a picture ID, it is not required but DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) offices will issue a photo ID with a photo for a small fee. Many countries have national ID cards. They are usually free but may take some time to obtain. Check expiration dates as they vary from document to document. Always double check with the airline as well. Find out what they want to see when you check in. This information is usually on the airline's website.

A big stumbling block can be the photo. Taking children's pictures is not always easy in the best of circumstances and getting a little one to cooperate with the requirements of an official document, even less so. Many insist on pure-white backgrounds. For a U.S. passport, both ears must show and the eyes must be open. A helpful trick to share with the photographer or if you are doing it yourself is to put a small baby in a bouncy seat covered with a white sheet. There can also be issues with photo sizes. Get this information clear and do not risk your file being refused or delayed for some petty detail that could have easily been adhered to if you had known.

As a reminder, U.S. citizens with other nationalities cannot enter the country on any other passport, with no exceptions for children. If living internationally, it may be easier to obtain your child's other passport but this will not be accepted by U.S. immigration. If you are American and are reading this in anticipation of an international adoption, your agency will give you the information you need but the child can enter the U.S. on his or her original passport, as long as his American nationality has not gone through yet.

If you are U.S. citizens, or any other nationality with the same requirement, I recommend having them with you any time you travel away from home, whether you need them or not. If for some reason, you have to travel to the U.S for unforeseen circumstances, such as a family emergency, you will want to head for the nearest airport so avoid complicating matters with having to return to

collect your passports.

I also want to recommend that anyone with loved ones beyond their borders keep a valid passport at all times just in case of the unforeseen, even if a journey is not planned in the near future and even if they will not be living there long.

It's also a good idea to regularly check passports for expiration dates. Remember that some countries require not just a valid passport but one that is valid for the next 3 or 6 months.

Someone reminded me to bring the medical records. This is a great idea but I have to confess, this is a case of do what I say, and not what I actually do. My kids' French health records are large and bulky - a feeble excuse I will admit! This is especially important if there could be language issues or if your child has any specific health concerns.

If you are not flying with the other parent, it is a good idea to have a permission letter. When the other parent signs the passport documents, this is usually giving the other parent permission to travel with the child but many like to have the letter as well. It is rare they would ask for anything but especially for international travel, it's a good idea. If you have sole custody of your child, bring documentation of that fact. If you are flying with someone else's children, even if related to you, please make sure you have both power of attorney (in case of emergencies) and a permission letter from the parents. Find out if it needs to be notarized.

2. Reserving

When you book your flight, a few tips can make the trip easier:

(1) Flying off season is not always possible, but booking a few days forward or back can be dramatically different in price and how full the flight is. It's easier with children when the flight isn't jam-packed. Look at a few flights if your itinerary is flexible with the agent or on the net. This can take a little time but it might be worth punching a few extra buttons to have a bit more peace in the air.

(2) I actually do better for both price and convenience by buying with an agent than over the net. Also, look at both the airlines' own sites, as well as discount sites when shopping around. Basically, I try everything...

(3) Some of the sites will not let you book a child under two in his or her own seat, automatically making them "lap" babies. I hate to tell you to cheat, but if you want a seat for your baby and there is

no way around the booking, add a year or two to the birth date. You are not trying to "get away" with anything, in fact, the airline is making more money off of you. It is simply to get around a computer glitch. Another trick is to take the fares and contact an agent. Tell them your dilemma and ask them to "match" the internet price ticket.

(4) Check all connections yourself. Make sure they are reasonable and there isn't some nasty surprise, like having to change airports. Remember that if you are flying into countries like the US, Australia and others, you must clear Customs and Immigration at your "first port of entry". If you are connecting, the process is actually straightforward. There are agents to help re-collect your bags and there are usually a lot of people doing the same thing. But when you reserve, be sure you have time to complete this process.

(5) Remember that 'direct' and a 'non-stop' are not always the same thing. Always double check that your flight does not stop and even change aircrafts, even if the same flight number is kept. With a "direct" flight, it can. Often these terms get confused and people think they are the same, sometimes not realizing until they board.

(6) Only let an agent convince you that a connection of an hour and a half is enough time if you are flying within the same country, to a connection point that has a lot of flights going to your final destination, staying in the same terminal, preferably with the same airline. You still have very little "jiggle" room if your first flight is delayed. If not all of the above applies, give yourselves two hours minimum, adding time for changing terminals, changing airlines and getting through security, immigration and customs (for international). This might be excessive to someone flying without kids but remember that you can't just jog through the airport anymore, like you do/did on solo business trips. Everything with children will take more time. By contrast, I can easily pass three hours in almost any airport with my kids when that would have been a horribly long wait in my pre-baby days so I do not dread long layovers like I used to either.

(7) You will hear a lot about which airline is "best" for traveling with children. I discussed car seat use above but in general, I really do not suggest digging into the subject unless you absolutely have no other criteria to consider. By the time you look at prices, availability and routing, I doubt there will be much choice. To be honest, from someone who worked out of countless airports, your experience might depend more on the crew on that specific route than on the airline itself. When someone gives their opinion on the subject, it's really only relevant if they flew on the same exact flight at the same time of year. I will have someone rave on about a certain airline to learn that the flight was half empty. The fact they got great service is not a big surprise.

(8) This is general information on connections; if changing airlines, ask if they have "one stop check-in" so that you will not have to repeat the process. Some "code shared" airlines have "seamless" check-in where you get all your boarding passes at one time. Other times, You will be checked in but will have to collect your boarding passes at the connection point. This isn't the end of the world and often can't be avoided. Just find out what steps your connection involves so that you are not standing in line for nothing or running into problems because you didn't do something. I do not think this is the criteria for which route or airline to take. I have chosen flights based on connections and airport changes but whether you can get your boarding passes right away is really only a detail, albeit a nice one if you can get it.

(9) Do not change airports if at all possible. Watch out for this especially on the net where the airports might be listed in tiny lettering. Look carefully at each airport code before hitting the "enter" button. This was my mistake once, which was rectified by a very nice reservations agent. I was saved because I called right away and there was room on the flight I really wanted. Do not make my mistake or you might not be as lucky!

3. Seating

"Bulkhead" seats are often recommended for families. We are talking about the ones with the wall in front. They are not necessarily in the front of the cabin, as many believe. It depends on the aircraft. I think they are ideal for toddlers as you avoid the problem of the child kicking the seats in front of them thus annoying the neighbors. You can also get in and out of these seats easier, as you will be doing that a lot with a toddler or baby. Plus, children can often play in that space on the floor, close to their parents and their seats.

Not everyone loves them though. There isn't much forward legroom (although some are comfortably set far back) and stowage is limited. If you have extra seats in that row, often the armrests often will not come up to let a child lie down (especially appreciated for children without car seats). Of course with the newer entertainment systems, it's often not possible to put up the armrests anywhere, anyway. Some bulkheads are in front of emergency exits so only those over 14 can sit there (among other restrictions). The other disadvantage cited is that there is a large, pull-down movie screen and that could bother some children if the seats do not have individual screen.

Normally, for bulkhead seats, you have to stow your bags just for take-off and landing. I have had reports that some foreign airlines require the bags be stowed for the entire flight. You may want to ask specifically about this if you are flying a non-U.S. carrier. Otherwise, feel free to get your things down once the seatbelt sign is off.

Some airlines will not reserve bulkheads ahead of time, and state that they are specifically reserved for families. You are put on a waiting list for them. If there is too much demand, they will determine at check-in who will get them. I found this to be a cut and dry process, depending on the age and/or number of children. If you run into this situation, Do not insist and make sure you have reserved as good seats as possible as a back-up. Also be clear on when and where they will announce the lucky winners.

I find it mega-annoying if I have been refused a bulkhead seat, only to step onboard and see all adults sitting there, who could have easily been placed in exit rows, which have more legroom and where children aren't allowed. I actually wrote and complained and they told me that they were reserved for frequent flyers. Ugh no! Get a clue!! It's bad because then the children get to kick other customers' backsides, who will then be annoyed and swear they will never fly that airline again. Tell the poor bruised-backsiders "Sorry, we requested bulkhead but this airlines policy is..." If you endure this too, please write and complain as I did. Maybe if enough of us speak out...

Recently, I read one of those (un) helpful tips to nursing mothers to sit by the window for more discretion. Perhaps there is a certain logic in this, I will admit, but if you are on a long flight, I can't imagine anything more inconvenient than having to crawl over two other passengers every time you need to get up. I picture this nursing mother trying to get over two businessmen with a crying baby who's just done a "blow out" diaper, lugging a gear-filled diaper bag. Not a pretty picture. Trust me, for the tiny bit more of discretion you will get, the inconvenience outweighs it by far. I have breastfed all three of mine in bulkhead and/or aisle seats and I never suffered as a result. More on feeding later on...

Some airlines have bassinets which mount on bulkhead wall. These are useful if available but You will usually have to be in a bulkhead to get one. Ask about what weight limit is, which varies from carrier to carrier. Some bassinets can be suspended from the ceiling for center seats. I have only heard about this and never actually seen one in action. American rules on these are strict and Do not be surprised if you can't get one on a U.S. company. I also understand that Canadian airlines now require that only sleeping babies can be placed in any bassinet in-flight. Again, there are lots of different rules and availability regarding bassinets.

A bassinet should not be seen as an option to avoid bringing a car seat. For safety, again, there is no replacement for a car seat. Sometimes too, you will be required to remove the baby from the bassinet and hold him or her in turbulence. Never leave an unattended baby asleep in a bassinet. The bassinet has to be stowed for take-off and landing so the child will then have to go either in his or her seat or on your lap.

Families flying with at least two adults often book two (or more) seats in front and back of each other. This is an obvious choice on smaller aircraft which do not have four across together and any airplane which has two seat rows. Also, this could work if there are at least four or five family members flying together. The advantage is that the most active child can sit directly behind a familiar adult or a baby in a car seat and not kick the seatback of a stranger.

Some parents also like booking the window and aisle seats when there are two, plus a lap-held baby, or a solo parent and child with seat, hoping the center one is left empty. If not, they can simply switch with the person who gets the middle seat. No one wants the center so swapping isn't usually a problem. Let them choose but point out it might be easier for them to take it.

Another version, an excellent tip sent in to me was an expanded version of the above. Perhaps a family of three is flying and the aircraft has four middle seats. The family will book two seats together and then skip a seat, booking the aisle. They then hope that no one sits in the middle seat. If someone does arrive, logically they will not mind swapping for the aisle seat. I suggest a parent be the one to switch in this case, if possible.

If you have a "stranger" in your row, the rest of the seats taken by your family, choose with care who is to sit next to them. I thought it would be better for me to sit next to them once. Bad call on my part. I was getting up too often. A better pick would be perhaps an older school-aged child. Obviously, you will not want to place a small baby or toddler there, if you can avoid it.

I have also heard of one parent sitting away from the rest and the two switching to give each other a break. This is often cited as yet another helpful flying "tip". The few times I saw this, the "displaced" parent ended up hovering over the other members of the family anyway. I talked about this with upgrades and often switching itself is not allowed.

Some parents love to sit in the very back. They like being close to the galley and toilets and figure their children's noise is less likely to disturb others. Added plus, passengers can often stand up in the back without disturbing others when the seatbelt sign is off. If your children need or want to get up, this way they are not too far from their seats. This is perhaps a better idea for flying with older children and young teens. Please note that the galley is not always located in the back, although the toilets usually are. I do not recommend the very back of the plane if your children have a tendency to get air sick. The back is bumpier.

4. Car Seats

I am a big promoter of "to each his own", for comfort and security for you, your child and those seated around you. Flying with a car seat is actually the only way to fly safely with a baby. Now that I have stated this, I have to qualify that commercial aviation is safe and there's very little chance of anything going wrong but if it does, your child is not protected.

Every child has to have a seat after his or her second birthday according to the FAA and most foreign air authorities. In some places, it's possible to fudge on this and I get all sorts of reports of people getting away with it.

Not only is there the safety issue but twice, I have had delays due to finding out that a child was over two without his own seat. Do not risk it. The burden will be on you to prove your child is under two and you might be charged the full fare one-way ticket if your child is not. Be prepared to show proper identification. For international travel, you have to have your child's passport anyway and the birth date will be checked. Some air regulators allow children to fly back on the same ticket after their second birthday and/or within a certain time frame.

Under two's are allowed on laps for commercial reasons. Airlines think they can sell more tickets and there's little push for parents since they save money and chances are their children will still arrive at the destination in good shape. So there is little incentive to change this rule, from parents, airlines and the rest of the traveling public for who it does not affect.

<http://www.cpsafety.com/articles/airplanetraavel.aspx>

In a car seat, the aircraft could turn upside down and it can still hold your child. There was recently a small aircraft accident in Canada where the only survivor was a three year old girl strapped into a car seat.

Yes, a child in a seat is less likely to disturb others. Mine were much calmer and settled in their own familiar seat. There is also the risk of a toddler jumping up and running around during taxi. If you can't control your toddler during this crucial phase of the flight, the whole family can be off-loaded for "non-cooperation with crew member instructions". This rule existed before 9/11 but is much more seriously enforced after. If any passenger got up during taxi, we were required to call the cockpit, who would then stop the whole aircraft. I had to do this a couple of times for pressing personal reasons. If it happens several times, you may find yourselves being brought back to the gate and "off-loaded".

As a mom, I had to strap a couple of unhappy toddlers in their seats for both take-off and landing. I noticed they usually quieted down once they realized this was a non-negotiable issue. While I do not like using force, once they were strapped in, I could concentrate on their unhappiness, comforting them, talking to them and holding their little hands, not chasing them or holding them down in their seat or on my lap.

Just a reminder: never use car seats provided by a car rental company. I had a bad experience with one and unfortunately, I am not alone. The car seats provided by rental companies are at best dirty, worn and incorrectly washed (i.e. soaked straps). At worst, they could be expired, missing parts and could have been involved in a recall or accident. Your children's safety is too important to take the risk of using one of these. Always bring your own or make other arrangements.

Another advantage to bringing one on board was that I could get up and attend to my own needs if my child fell asleep in their car seat. No, I didn't take any longer than necessary but a much appreciated trip to the restroom or to get a drink. I almost always fly alone and this was especially useful. I knew that turbulence could start and my child was safe. I usually tried to tell a neighbor or Flight Attendant where I was going, or at least in which direction.

If I haven't made a strong enough argument for bringing car seats by this time, I will describe what happens in an emergency. Please stop reading if this will upset you, but we were instructed to wrap the baby in a blanket and place them on the floor. I am so glad I never was put in a position to have to give these instructions but the parents were to hold the child to the ground during the emergency landing. This has worked and has saved lives...but not always.

Usually, car seats do not count against your baggage allowance but always ask, especially if flying a very small aircraft and/or a low-cost company.

Car seats pose a few practical challenges. Because of the details, this information will be separated and discussed later in this article as they apply to flying.

5. Car Seat Alternatives

Some companies outside of North America still use "belly belts". These are seat belts that attach to the parents' belts. These offer no protection to the child but their use is justified by other air authorities citing that they keep the child from flying through the cabin on impact. Children are safer loose in the adult's lap. The problem is that with a forward thrust, adults have come down on their own child. This is called the "human air bag" theory. For this reason, the air authorities in Canada, the U.S. Germany and elsewhere ban these devices.

Alternate and travel car seats are never allowed on board. The seat has to have a hard back. Also, research these products carefully before traveling. Many are not approved by car seat technicians, although allowed. There are a few good car vests. While these are a viable alternative in the car to a seat belt, they usually need a shoulder belt or a LATCH hook, neither of which are available on aircraft. It's a good, safe product but unfortunately, will not offer any protection on an aircraft.

Booster seats are never FAA approved. They basically only position the shoulder strap, which airplane seats lack. Also, airplane seats collapse forward for use in an evacuation. For these reasons, only seats with hard backs and internal harnesses are approved. If you have a seat which converts to a booster, check your manual carefully. With the internal harness, it may be FAA approved but used as a booster with the adult seat belt, it will not.

Presently, there is only one item that can replace a car seat, the CARES harness.

<http://kidsflysafe.com>. They claim that it is as safe as a car seat but it has no side protection, nor crotch strap, so I find this hard to believe. The child can easily detach the seatbelt and there are complaints that they can't bend their legs and either have to point them straight out or sit cross-legged while flying.

Your child has to have a separate seat to use this product. You can try to ask for an empty seat, as instructed for car seats but having this item does not give you any priority or right to an extra seat. Again, this is a favor to parents, not a requirement.

This is a very useful item in certain cases but for approximately US\$75, it is expensive for something that can only be used in an airplane. Obviously, it is much easier to transport than even the lightest car seat.

What you do not want to do is to use it on board while checking the car seat as baggage which risks that your seat could get lost and/or damaged. If you only have one child and/or are more than one adult flying, transporting a car seat is actually not that big a deal as their website suggests. More on that subject further on in this article.

Some enterprising ebay and craigslist participants are actually renting these items. I also imagine that they have good resale value, once the youngest child in the family outgrows it.

Another big plus with this item is that it is approved by quite a few air authorities. So far, it is allowed in North America, the U.K., Australia, Singapore, New Zealand but European Union approval is still pending. This item avoids the dilemma discussed earlier of "will they let me use my seat?"

Be aware that there is only a small age group that can use this item. Your child has to be at least a year old and weigh between 22 and 44lbs compared to a higher-harnessed seat which could go from birth to age 6 and can still be used in a car. I understand that a higher weight version is currently being tested but it is not yet available and I have not been able to get information about this.

If you have car seats organized where you are headed, such as visiting relatives who have reliable car seats your children will fit, this is a good plan. Remember that most seats expire after 6 years so be aware of that when borrowing or using other peoples' seats. It's best to know the seat's history and never use any that have been in an accident.

If you are headed to a large city where you will be exclusively using public transport, a CARES harness would make sense in this case too. It's also a good alternative if you have several children close in age and physically can't take all the seats you need, especially if flying alone. You will probably still have to find a way to organize seats at your destination, avoiding using rental seats and/or checking your seat. In certain cases, it may be a situation of choosing the least of the evils.

No other similar item is approved for flying. Be careful of misleading marketing with other products. One item is a vest the child wears that is then attached to the adult's seatbelt. It actually advertises that it "meets and exceeds FAA standards" when in truth, there are no FAA standards for these products. It says in its small print that the item is only meant to hold a child during the flight itself, not on take-off and landing. Turns out they used FAA facilities to test but this does not translate to actual approval. One airline actually bans this product.

6. Car Seat Policies

Before deciding whether you want to spend the money on the seat for your child, find out what your airline policies are, which can vary widely. Some of the same airlines which brag that they are "child-friendly" because of their amenities, actually fall short on actually keeping your child safe. They may hand out a lot of toys but when it comes to securing your child, they just do not come up to the bar. When booking, this could also be a deciding factor in which airline to choose. It is for me...

If you are flying a U.S. registered company and your child has his or her own seat with a FAA certified car seat, it is your right to use it on board and be protected by law.

Do not be intimidated by stories of Flight Attendants not allowing car seats on board in the U.S. Know that the rules are in your favor and stand your ground... politely. Print up some of the links in this article and bring your owner's manual. Ask nicely to speak to the purser before things get heated and

you can also ask that they show you in writing where your seat is *not* allowed. Every Flight Attendant with any U.S. company has to have their manual on every flight. They do not have to memorize all the information but they are required to be able to use the manual and know where to find certain information at will.

If you are not flying a U.S. or Canadian company, your rights are not guaranteed and the requirements can be very inconsistent. Check directly with the airline, not necessarily that country's air authority. Individual airlines in the U.S. are not allowed to override FAA regulations (although they can add to them) but elsewhere, an airline can simply decide to change the rules set by their national air authorities. For example, in some places, car seats are allowed, and regulations set accordingly, but specific airlines have decided to ban car seats entirely and none are allowed in the cabin. Be especially careful of "low-cost" companies outside of North America. They justify it by citing that this safety compromise saves time.

Some airlines, by contrast, are actually very flexible and allow car seats with approval from multiple nationalities. For example, if you have an FAA approved seat, you can still use it on some non-U.S. airlines, especially in the Far and Middle East. It will be stated on their website.

A common rule found many places around the world, but specifically in the U.K., is that the car seat is required to face forward. This rule has no safety logic and means that most infant seats, which are designed only to face backwards, cannot be used at all.

In addition, some airlines do not allow car seat use on take-off and landing for babies under six months old. Some even then require the use of the dangerous "belly belts" which put them at risk if there is great forward impact. This goes against all my Flight Attendant training and I have no idea as to why a smaller baby does not have the right to be kept secure in his or her own seat, and face the correct direction according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Also, there can be age limits. Children are often prevented from using a car seat on his or her third birthday, regardless of weight. If you have an approved car seat and plan to take it on board to use at your destination, too bad. You have to risk damage and/or loss by checking it. If your child is of small stature, that's also your problem. This could affect children with certain disabilities so check if there are local laws which override this nonsensical rule.

By the way, I have to say that these rules will continue if parents do not speak up. If you think that changes need to be made by your local air authority, please let them know. Why should children in the U.S. be allowed to fly more safely than elsewhere?

I have used the "wrong" nationality car seat for my child on many occasions. I simply board, install the seat and see if anyone notices. This has worked more times than it hasn't. The seats were approved for airline use but not by the "right" countries but when they were removed, I simply handed it over and they stowed it on board somewhere. There was no penalty or punishment. I did have the purser brought over once and discussed it. He actually admitted that he was, indeed, forcing my child to travel less safely but his hands were tied by the rules. Another time, on another airline and nationality, they took it, told me they'd give it back to us and then simply didn't.

Some airlines are not inspected as often as others. I used to not check seats for the FAA sticker on purpose. I felt strongly that if the parents were conscientious enough to cart the seat on board and use it, I was not going to split hairs and give them any problems. Once I had a FAA inspector and actually told him my sentiments. This same inspector actually was on several of my flights and contributed a lot of the information included in this article.

Remember that no matter how illogical and nonsensical a rule may be, but worldwide, cooperating with the crew is required. Crew members cannot change rules set by their airline and/or national air authority. Overall, commercial air travel is very safe and statistically, your child is still safer on board the aircraft, no matter how he or she is carried or held, than they were in the car on the way to the airport. If things are not resolved to your satisfaction, you must follow their instructions, no matter how counter-logical, do what they say and register a complaint directly with the airline later.

7. Car Seat Placement in the Cabin

Having a car seat rarely limits where you can sit in the cabin. Contrary to popular belief, car seats are not required to be at the windows. As long as they do not block another passenger's exit to the aisle, they can go in the center, including center bulkhead seats. Double check with the airline in case they have their own rules about this, but otherwise, there is not a problem sitting there.

If you are flying a U.S. carrier, here is a FAA document to prove this, that you might want to print up. Look specifically at page 11 (at the bottom).

[http://rgl.faa.gov/Regulatory_and_Guidance_Library/rgAdvisoryCircular.nsf/0/60d70126cf679d5a8625723b007841e7/US\\$FILE/AC%20120-87A.pdf](http://rgl.faa.gov/Regulatory_and_Guidance_Library/rgAdvisoryCircular.nsf/0/60d70126cf679d5a8625723b007841e7/US$FILE/AC%20120-87A.pdf)

The real issue is not the fact you have a car seat but that your child is under 15 years old. There are restrictions for both children and those with physical handicaps in the emergency rows and next to emergency exits.

If you are worried if your car seat will or will not fit, measure the bottom and call the airline. Have your exact flight number and they can look up the width of the seat. Most of the time, it is not a big deal if the car seat spills into your seat: you can usually adjust the armrests to get it into position.

8. Upgrading

I really advise against using any upgrades if you have a baby or toddler. It sounds nice, a little more room to move, a better meal, etc., but the truth is that businesspeople get really annoyed with young children, very quickly. Some have to disembark straight into meetings and presentations on arrival and need to sleep the maximum possible. Many of those passengers have justified paying the extra money specifically to avoid the noise in economy and including sitting near children and babies.

If you have frequent flyer points and a child under two years of age, your points are better spent getting two seats in economy rather than one in business. If you have a bad back or other physical problem, having two seats in economy is better for you than having to constantly lift your child. This is not made any easier if you are sitting in a bigger business seat.

The atmosphere is definitely more welcoming for little ones in the back. There's a bit more noise, children are less noticeable and moving around is more acceptable. I had several small members of a royal family once in first class once and the other passengers were not thrilled. For the record, both companies I worked for did not allow their own employees to fly with their children in business class until they were at least 8 or 10 years old.

But if you want to sit up in the front with your child, and you have the money and/or points to do so, it is your right. Some are very confident of their child's behavior and if their child cries, too bad for the rest. If you have a "thick skin" and are determined, by all means go for it, especially if the child has a seat. On a really empty flight, it might even be a good idea. As a gross generalization, you may find your child is more welcome on a flight headed to a typically vacation-oriented, rather than business-oriented, destination.

If your family is split and one parent is in business, make it clear to your children that they are not to go up to that class to visit the other parent. Many airlines have rules preventing passengers from walking into a higher class of service, even if related someone seated in that section. You may not be allowed to swap either, so do not plan on doing this if you book the separate seat in business or first. I really advise against families splitting up in general. I have seen it go wrong on too many flights and I recommend for many reasons, sitting together.

9. Special meals

Consider ordering special meals. Do not assume your child will like and eat the standard fare. To respond to complaints about bland airline food, some companies have gone exotic so unless your child is used to sushi, pâté and quinoa, order some sort of special meal when you book. If you reserve online, call the airline afterwards to let them know. Tell the reservation agent the age of the children if you choose children's meals, but sometimes it works better if the whole family is eating the same thing. Some parents complain that the "children's meals" are too "greasy" and some airlines have cut them out due to budgetary constraints.

If your child has any food allergies, you may have meal options to accommodate your little one. Nut allergies are especially common and very serious if they occur in-flight. The airline at least has to know and they should be able to inform you of their policy, whether it be with a special meal or whether the airline has eliminated nuts from their menu.

We usually order Kosher, which is usually pretty tame and almost always an option. It has the added advantage of coming in handy individually wrapped containers of which various units can be saved for eating later on. Since we are not religious, I ask them to remove the bulky outer wrapping ahead of time. You do not have to be Jewish to order it but they often arrive from the kitchen frozen so ask the Flight Attendants to check that it's completely thawed before serving.

Be aware that once you order a special meal, you usually cannot change your mind and have a standard meal. If the flight is not full and/or they are over-catered, maybe they can accommodate this request but do not expect or demand it.

Airline policies can vary but it's usually best to order these meals at least a few days ahead of time. Do not wait until check-in.

10. Low Cost Companies

These new companies are making air travel more affordable but some of the rules are slightly different than flying with regular companies.

First of all, they often fly into really remote airports. In fact, objection has been raised over what city they even supposedly serve and these have ended up in court. Some airlines even list their airports by different cities than for which they were originally named, for example, one company claims to fly to "Barcelona" when it is really Girona. Occasionally, they actually use a more convenient airport or

perhaps they land closer to where you are headed, but find out exactly where they land and do not simply go by the city on their list.

I recommend never mixing same-day travel between low-cost and "mainstream" companies. They do not have agreements (another cost-saving) and there are other complications with totally separate reservations.

One way they sell tickets cheaper is that they do not always handle connections. Tickets are often sold "point to point" and you arrive at the connection point, you get your bags, pass through arrivals and head for initial check-in all over again. I have done it alone with three children and it was not actually that terrible. It is usually obvious when you book that you are buying two separate tickets so it should not come as an ugly surprise. Your baggage tags should have the right airport. Just remember to schedule your trip with lots of transit time. I gave it three hours and kept it sane and stress-free. We actually sat down and had a meal in-between, bought some books and made a few calls.

Also, if they offer "priority boarding" at a cost, it is a good idea with children. Ask but they probably do not pre-board families. This "priority boarding" is usually not expensive but a silly thing to actually pay for. We end up simply getting on the first bus out to the aircraft but with open seating, you might have to really fight to seat the family together. One experience doing that convinced me that the three Euros per person was well spent.

Some low cost airlines do offer reserved seats... if you pay a fee. I recommend paying the fee, unless the flight is completely empty (a fact you may not be able to check). The problem is that if your family is split up, you may be in a position where you are asking other people to move to accommodate you - people who may have paid for their reservation who realize that you saved yourself the fee and are now inconveniencing them.

Check that there are no restrictions to flying with more than one child. At least one airline does not allow one adult to fly with two children under a certain age.

If you want to use a car seat and you are not flying with a U.S. company, make sure that this is allowed. U.S. companies are not allowed to ban car seat use on board, but other nationalities can and do.

Low Cost Companies in most countries usually do not serve meals and when they do, they are overpriced, limited and usually not the best. Meanwhile, you are welcome to bring a whole picnic onboard if you want. In the terminals where low-cost companies fly, often there are plenty of food

stands which are conveniently after security points. So head for your gate quickly and then stock up for you and your kids. Remember that security is usually not a problem when it comes to food (only drink) if you bring food from home.

Be very aware of bags. It is usually cheaper to pay for your bags ahead of time. It might be better to over estimate your luggage because if you add it later, or worse, show up at the airport with more, it might be a steep fee. This is a general tip but parents should be aware that extra baggage at the airport might mean waiting in another line and dragging out the check-in process.

Check-in is something that families with small children want to keep to a minimum. Many airlines in general, are offering online check-in, which means only handing the bags over (if any) at the airport. Take advantage if this is offered by your airline.

11. Packing

I really, really do not recommend taking anything on board except things you will need for the flight. Garment bags and children are an especially bad mix. If I have to bring evening dresses, they are now laid out carefully on the bottom of my suitcase, only slightly wrinkled, but definitely worth not carting them along with my kids. If possible, do not pack delicate clothes with any liquid bottles in the same suitcase. Otherwise, they should be fine. My "best-woman" and my daughter's flower girl dresses were even transported across the Atlantic to my sister's wedding this way and arrived in excellent shape.

Dragging bottles of wine with the diapers is not fun either, even on a non-stop. Remember you have to pass security points and may have to walk a long way. Even something small can easily be lost when you are flying with children.

Some airlines are charging for extra bags, but it is still worth paying the fee and carting less things to the gate. You run the risk that the staff will see your extra bags and you will end up having to check them anyway. They are on the lookout for this! It's just not worth the headache.

If you are flying with more than one adult and more than one child, you may want to separate supplies for each child in case you end up sitting apart. If you have two diapered children, this is especially important. You may not need two separate diaper bags, although you could, but pack your carry-ons accordingly.

I will not discuss checked-in luggage, since that is not that relevant, but the one tip I do want to pass on is if you have any battery-operated toys. Either turn them off and tape the switch in place or

better yet, remove the batteries altogether. It could be a security problem if it turns on during the journey. I put the batteries in a small plastic bag and tape that to the toy so it is easier to put together again after we get home. Also, any toy with a remote control is not allowed to be used onboard. You can bring the toy but put the remote control in the checked luggage.

The only other tip about checked-in luggage I want to add is to pack equally-sized bags which weigh more or less the same. Pick them up and make sure they are all about the same weight. This is a general tip but with kids, chances are you will have more gear than previously and do not waste time during check-in paying for oversized bags.

For carry-on items, when my children were still in diapers, I took a backpack, a sling and a diaper bag. I talk about slings and baby carriers later on. I do not take a separate purse but do use a small bag with the valuables around my neck. This means I do not have to dig or pull my backpack off when I have to show tickets and passports. Everything else goes in the backpack, more valuable items stuffed at the very bottom. The backpack is bigger than a standard sized one but small enough to still go under the seat. The backpacks I like come up to my knee when placed on the floor. I like ones with a top handle and lots of side pockets so I can organize things. The diaper bag had everything I needed up to the first part of the flight including the food and first aid items. I use the backpack for the extra diapers, the never-seen-before toys and the change of clothes.

Yes, I bring a complete change for all of us. Not enough room? At least bring a pair of shorts and T-shirt for each of you, just in case. I put everything in plastic and tie them up with lots of rubber bands to squeeze them down to take up less space. Like I mentioned before, I split the diapers into two packets and put one in each the diaper bag and the backpack.

Now that our bottle and diaper days are over, the diaper bag is ditched. I only have the backpack but each child carries his or her own with toys they've chosen. I still take the food and the extra clothes myself. They generally started doing this once they could walk. My youngest at age two, did not do too well with hers, so decide if your child can manage it and not lose or forget it. I also suggest doing some culling of what goes in these backpacks. Avoid anything security will not like and anything that is noisy. Make sure nothing is so valuable it cannot be lost or replaced. I keep new, never-seen-before toys and books with me until the "unveiling" onboard and then they carry it, giving me more space in my backpack. Security does not like wrapped presents but put it in a colorful bag if you want the same effect.

I take my camera in my backpack. Another good tip I received is to take recent pictures in case the child gets lost. This is especially easy with a digital camera. You can simply snap them right before going, in the same clothes, if you have time. If they are not worth keeping, the photos can simply be

erased later on. If the unmentionable happens, you have photos of exactly what they look like and exactly what they are wearing, to show the authorities.

Before leaving home, empty your bags, especially your diaper bag and search for any forgotten gels or liquids now banned under the new security restrictions. There is no great risk or fear here. Security will simply confiscate anything they do not want you to take. It is annoying and time-consuming to have them have to remove items, so do a ruthless clean-out just for the sake of getting through security with a minimum of hassle.

The new rule has to do with this Ziploc bag that is allowed. Read up on it yourself:

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtm>.

Here is an actual grid saying what is allowed and what is not:

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>

I could not confirm if whether the liquids have to be in the original containers. I suggest using travel packs, the type they sell in the bins at drug stores, including toothpaste. Bring new, unopened items, rather than for example, diaper cream you have been using, just to be on the safe side. The TSA, for example, does not allow half tubes of toothpaste.

I take a cloth bag - the kind they sell in grocery stores as an alternative to plastic and paper. I also have plastic bags for anything nasty but for this purpose, I go for cloth. It fits in my carry-on, will not rip and does not make noise. Once on board, I remove what I need for the next few hours such as wipes, a couple of diapers, perhaps my own toiletries, etc. and put them in this cloth bag, getting the rest of my things out of the way. I used to drag the whole diaper bag into the lavatories but that did not work too well and I looked like I was moving in. Now, I simply throw in what I need for that specific lavatory excursion (there will be lots of lavatory talk ahead, this features prominently when flying with children). My backpack basically stays in the overhead bin, with the extra cloths, reserve diapers and anything else that will only be needed later on. The diaper bag, by contrast, went down at my feet after take-off (if seated in the bulkheads) or was stowed under the seat in front of me.

If you only have one child, even in diapers and/or your flight is not too long, you can probably also leave the diaper bag at home. Both a backpack and diaper bag are probably necessary if you have more than one child in diapers and are taking a long flight. For myself, I bring one small makeup bag with my toothbrush, floss, paste, face cleanser, hand lotion, lip balm and lipstick (for right before landing). Even with new travel restrictions, I manage to get all that through but I am prepared to throw any of it away. My hands and lips get really dry on the plane so I was happy to keep those items. I try to remember anti-bacterial wipes, which are good to wipe down the tray-tables, the taps

in the lavatories, as well as for your and your children's hands. I found that moistened flushable toilet paper is now available in little individual packs, good news for recently-trained children.

I make sure everything, including the children, can be carried in more than one way. My backpack has a handle or can fit in the stroller, the diaper bag can go over my shoulder or, also, on the stroller and the stroller can fit all three children - obviously not at once! Again, the sling could fit both my younger two children for ages so I had a variety of ways to get through an airport. I see too many parents with sleeping children draped over their shoulders. Not a fun way to get where you need to go.

I am a big Ziploc fan, even before the TSA required them, and this is a classic travel tip and now actually required. Recommended quart-sized bags now even have a little airplane printed on them. Put all liquids together in them (called "medium" in metric-system countries). Whatever medicine, with the appropriate spoon, can go together in one Ziploc. All the band-aids in another. Even the wipes merit their own. Open my bag and it looks like an advertisement for Ziploc. Not only is it easier to find stuff this way, it is cleaner (in case anything spills outside or inside. But the big advantage is in the dreaded security check. When they go through your stuff, they will not actually have to touch any of it and they can see what it is. It is also easier to put it all back together after they are done going through your things.

Another "helpful hint" I read about had to do with bringing large safety pins and making a tent to give the child more "privacy". I have issues with this idea for a number of reasons. First, getting the pins past security. Second, bothering the people around you. What happens if those in front of you want to recline or raise their seat? If the seatbelt sign comes on in-flight, the flight attendants have to check to make sure everyone is strapped in. This would be difficult with your child under that thing. The F/A's would probably wake them. Oh, and what about the wonderful in-flight air, even staler under the blanket? Also, I do not really see the whole point. My advice, leave the pins at home!

Take snacks and again, do not worry about security. I have had no problems myself and no reports. They are stricter with liquids and will simply take something from you if it is not allowed, which is unlikely. Avoid bring snacks with peanuts in them. Airlines stopped handing out peanuts because of allergies. People with peanut allergies can be so sensitive that even having nuts around them can set off a reaction and this could be a scary thing for a child to witness. Yes, unlikely but who needs to take that risk? Also, peanuts are choking hazards. All the Flight Attendants know the Heimlich manoeuvre but none of them need to practice on your child. Grapes are another choking hazard You will find on flights. If you bring them from home, halve them (even for older toddlers) and look out for them with your meals.

Put luggage tags with your name and address on all your bags if possible while still at home. Those small ones the airlines give out are easily ripped off. You also want to write the address on a piece of paper and put that inside the bag.

12. Dressing for Flying

I do not recommend sandals for anyone, big or little no matter how hot it is or will be at your destination. If connecting, you might want to avoid high-top laced shoes since you might have to remove them a couple of times in security, although I do not think it necessary to pick your footwear specifically for this purpose. I bring socks to wear on board and remove all of our shoes as soon as we are airborne (not before take-off in case of an emergency evacuation). You can also bring slippers. Those baby shoes made completely out of leather work great. If not in a bulkhead, shoeless feet will have less potential to kick the seats in front of you.

I prefer to dress my toddler girls in leggings, even in summer. I put my boy in light, loose pants. Avoid white and go for patterns. Often it's advised to dress children in bright colors, to be detected better in a crowd. Do not feel the need to dress for the weather either for your departure or destination. The airports and aircrafts will be climate-controlled anyway. Put the appropriate gear at the top of the luggage if you are flying into an entirely different climate and throw it on when you get there.

If your baby does not crawl yet, consider putting him or her in a full sleep suit, preferably with feet out of a light material. Lots of babies travel that way and no one will think "Why is that kid still in pajamas?" If it bothers you that your child is garbed in sleepwear for travel, or if the trip to or from the airport is hot, change in-flight. Also bring a bonnet, even in summer, especially if your baby is bald. It can get a little chilly onboard. A warm cabin makes people dehydrated, sick and affects air quality so it is kept a little cool on board on purpose. If it feels outright cold, tell a flight attendant. It used to be possible to adjust those eyeball things above your seat if you are flying on an aircraft which still has those. But dress the whole family in layers so that they are comfortable at all points in your journey.

I always bring bottle of waters or sippy cups for my children. Bring them empty or be prepared to dump the contents in security. I do not depend on getting enough water onboard and I am usually dying a thirst during the wait at the gate. Please be clear, especially with bottles, they do NOT have an unlimited supply of bottled water onboard. We used to run out at the end of the first service when I was working. Do not depend entirely on getting bottled water the whole flight for your child. With the new travel restrictions, water too might be confiscated in security. Water can be purchased now once past the checkpoint.

Unfortunately, I am getting mixed reports on this subject. If you are flying with a baby and normal baby bottles, there does not seem to be a problem with formula and water. Security is fine with letting that pass. Older kids are posing more of a problem with their various drinking needs. Sometimes cartons and boxes of milk and juice are allowed, other times not. Some children are being forced to drink down their drinks in front of security while others are left alone. Logically, if the liquid is drinkable, it's not dangerous.

What was allowed out may not be allowed back, especially when flying internationally. Try to get the skinny on the airport where you will be flying from and be aware that international and domestic sections might operate differently.

I still recommend bringing sippy cups for practical purposes to avoid spilling onboard and to transport whatever liquid you can. When the drink cart rolls around, I ask the F/A's to fill those up, instead of giving them open cups. Keep using them for as long as the child is willing to drink from them! Also, those disposable kinds work well too as well as the sport-style bottle with spouts that can be pulled up. These are more acceptable options for older children.

13. Preparing Children

Once a child is aware of the experience, around ages two or three, it is best to discuss it ahead of time but in a very nonchalant manner. Actually, children usually love to fly and it is rare that they are scared. It is an adventure for them.

There are some good children's books on this subject. I actually recommend getting them from the library (if you can), rather than buying them, unless you are sure you will use them again.

What can be scary for children is going through security. Even my veteran flyers do not like this part. Here is a good page to read on the subject from the TSA website. Look at it even if you are not flying a U.S. company: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/children/index.shtm>.

Discuss the fact that they will have to put all their belonging on the X-ray machine belt, have to walk through an arch and perhaps take off their shoes too. Make it clear that they will not have to separate from you but will have to go through the metal detector by themselves. I walk through first and then coax my little one to follow. Tell them that you will be doing the same.

Some flying tips say to go through the whole process step-by-step. This might be "over-kill", especially if your child has flown before. Usually, you have a few weeks, if not months before leaving. Point out airplanes in the sky, airports, when you pass them and any airplane images you see on T.V. and avoid

any movies with scary airplane scenes. Most of these are so full of inaccuracies that we airline personnel even find them amusing. Clueless Flight Attendants, terrorists able to bring an entire army's arsenal on board, and other completely absurd scenes. Even if you point out such absurdities, you child will not necessary take that information on board.

14. Check-in

First, a quick explanation on airport organization. The check-in area is called "landside" as opposed to "airside", or once you get through security. You remain in "airside" until you leave the baggage area or Customs, if flying internationally. Landside is a totally public area. Children usually have energy at this point of the adventure and often want to run while you are stuck sitting in line.

I really suggest bringing someone to the airport and have them stick around and help you watch the children. Airport parking is expensive, especially the temporary lots but this is not the time to skimp on this expense. Have them occupy the children while you wait in line or trade this duty off between the adults. Make sure they rejoin you at the desk when it is your turn because, especially for international travel, the agent will want to verify all your travel documents and see all of the family members.

Be careful if you are alone and flying with your little ones when help is offered. Do not let anyone "landside" ever stay alone with your child(ren). By all means, accept help but direct the Good Samaritan to your bags and be with them. Most people are genuine but do not take chances.

Try to put off any restroom stops until you are past security, especially if you are alone with your children.

I understand that curbside check-in still exists in some places. Since I do not have experience with this, although I remember it as a child and remember my mother was able to do this once, I do understand it can be great for families with children. Just be careful of the traffic outside while handing over your bags. This is one of the first casualties when stricter security levels are brought into force so do not assume this service will always be in effect.

Another "helpful" tip that I read on the internet advised parents to not let their child sleep on the way to the airport. Obviously, they do not live two hours away like we do but... having a cranky toddler while trying to check-in, getting through security and boarding sounds like a nightmare, and just plain bad advice! For the record, I let mine sleep and I have never had a problem getting them to snooze after take-off. Young babies and kids can get over-stimulated and then not sleep because of all the

excitement. You do not even need to know what happens if a sleep-deprived child arrives at the airport only to face a delay...

But a good tip I read somewhere else had to do with older kids. Some of our offspring like to make running commentaries on what they are seeing, other people, etc. This can be amusing in the car, or at home, but in this situation, there will be plenty who will be listening in earshot. This is especially important for bilingual families like ours. Your kids might be used to no one else understanding whatever you speak at home but if you are flying to that country, the whole plane might be listening in when your offspring express their opinions on their fellow travelers. In any language, if you know your child has a habit of "calling it like they see it", perhaps have a talk beforehand.

Go early. Shoot for a half-hour more than they recommend. This helps cut down on the wait, which is especially grim with children. People tend to show up right on the minute they have been told. Try to go for when the check-in desk opens. This might mean you go straight to the counter (unless you are flying charter). I have often finished checking-in to see a huge line behind me.

If you have any seat "issues", either you do not have assignments or you have requested a change, try to get that sorted at check-in right away. If it is still unresolved and you might get new boarding passes at the gate, ask exactly when you would be called to the desk at boarding. Ask also if you have to line up there (probably not, but be sure). Be clear about both the procedure and the timing so you can organize yourself and your kids, i.e. "We have half an hour to sit and relax..."

In winter, while checking in, I take the coats and jackets and put them together at the top of one of the suitcases. On arrival, I can just pull them out and do not have to fiddle with them during the flight. Ask if you have to board from outside before deciding whether keeping the jackets is a better idea. I was also scolded for giving this tip by people who, say, have to connect through Chicago or those who swear they make good blankets (remember that a lot of domestic flights no longer supply blankets, especially during the day). I can see missing a connection and having to stay in a local hotel, which happened to me once pre-baby where I had to wait for the bus in Chicago, in winter, so this is definitely access-your-own-situation tip!

When you check in, ask if they can 'block' the seat next to you to give you some more space, especially if you do not have a seat for your lap baby. Bring the car seat to the aircraft, even if you have not booked a seat and the car seat can be gate-checked if they cannot manage an empty place beside you. They will also only use it if they really need it, and if so, it is very likely that it might be one of us airline employees traveling on a really reduced-fare ticket.

15. Getting and Accepting Help

Generally, the airlines do not offer assistance to families with small children. I used to call and ask anyway but my request was almost always refused. The truth is that staffing can be tight and passengers with mobility issues are priority. You may say that you only need help for a few minutes but sometimes just positioning personnel is the stumbling block. They may be needed for another flight that is arriving right after yours.

Sometimes I was able to "piggy back" a family if there was a handicapped person being helped. Some airports use electric cars and if there is a little extra room, they can squeeze in a mother and her baby if going the same direction.

But generally, you have to plan on not getting any help. We used to help families getting off the aircraft, especially if they disembarked last, but often, we had to then go to a different part of the airport and couldn't continue with them. Other passengers might offer assistance. By all means, take them up on the offer but use common sense. Never leave them alone with your children or let them take them anywhere. You may find that your usually-outgoing child will be a bit clingier, so do not expect them to go to anyone else or even take a stranger's hand. Have the Good Samaritan push a cart or carry a bag while you stay next to them. Be especially wary if you have not passed security and are in the "landside" area of the airport. This is a public area but once past security, the only people allowed are either employees or other passengers. Also, it's harder to leave that area since it is "sealed". You may be more comfortable accepting help while in this section of the airport while declining it entirely in the public "landside" area.

The most likely time when I both most need help and when it is more likely to be offered is at baggage claim when I am torn between watching my children and watching out for when my bags come off the belt. Sometimes my children end up playing with someone else's and they offer to watch all of them while I drag back each bag.

16. Organizing Leaving and Arriving

These are somewhat general tips but when you fly with children, you have to be extra-organized. A slight oversight could cause a lot of avoidable inconveniences which are annoying when you are alone, but unbearable with your offspring.

A very unhelpful flying tip I have read is to not let a child sleep on the way to the airport. We live two hours from the closest major airport so trying to manage that with my own kids would be impossible.

Having a cranky toddler during check-in, getting through security and boarding sounds like a nightmare, not to mention if there's a delay. I honestly can't see the harm in a quick sleep in the car. In my opinion, this is simply bad advice, if you read it elsewhere. For the record, I let mine sleep and I have never had a problem getting them to snooze after take-off. Children can get over-stimulated and then not sleep because of all the excitement so the whole plan could backfire anyway.

If someone is dropping you off at the airport, if at all possible, have them park and come inside with you. They can help watch your children during check-in and if they can still until the flight actually leaves, this is a good idea in case of a cancellation. Have everyone bring cell phones, fully charged before leaving for the airport, and make sure you have each others' numbers.

Before you leave, if you are being met at the airport at your destination, give the person meeting you your entire itinerary, not just the last flight they will be meeting. Instruct them to check either the internet or call the airline's reservation number before leaving for the airport to make sure that all flights were on time.

If you are flying standby, give them the information about the flight that you will be trying for first. The code I used to use was if I did not call, that meant that I did make the flight, not the opposite. No news is good news. Many times, standby passengers are handed boarding pass and shoved onboard last minute. You will not have time even to call or SMS from your cell phone. By contrast, if you were not successful the first time, you probably will have time to call and give the details of the next flight you will be trying to get on.

If calling poses a problem because of time differences, organize this ahead of time. There are a number of solutions including having them turn their ringer off or having you call a cell phone turned off for the night. You leave a message and they check as soon as they are up. You could even call a "third party" who stays up later/gets up earlier than the picker-upper, who would then call at a more appropriate time. Usually, if there is that much of a time difference, the flight will be long enough to sort something out. If there is any change of plans, especially when flying standby, remember that airlines will not say what flight you are on for security reasons.

I have seen a lot of upset passengers onboard after delays and problems with their journeys. These kinds of problems are inconvenient anyway but that much worse if you are stuck at the airport with cranky, hungry, tired children (when you are also cranky, tired and hungry) while waiting because someone did not get the information they should have about your flight.

If you are planning to rent a car at your destination, you may want to consider renting the next day instead of right away. Either have a car/limo arranged to meet you or grab a taxi instead, especially

after a long flight. Getting to the car rental place, which might involve a long walk and/or shuttle bus, dealing with the paperwork, etc. with kids might not be too pleasant. It is probably worth the extra money, plus it might save you a day's rental on the car anyway. With two adults, one can go get the rental the next day while the other stays at the hotel with the children. Consider how much driving you will really be doing the first day after your trip anyway. The only sight that you and your children will initially want to see, may be your beds.

17. Strollers/Pushchairs/Buggies

People ask me which stroller I recommend for flying. I always say to bring the stroller you need for the entire trip, not specifically for flying. I have seen too many tiny babies slumped in rickety umbrella strollers in airports. There is no logic to compromising your baby's comfort.

Never buy a stroller with the idea of bringing it onboard the aircraft as a carry-on item. Unless you are flying charter, low-cost or a very small regional carrier, the stroller you have will probably be acceptable. There are a few foreign airlines that allow this but I still do not recommend doing it.

Normally, the stroller does not count against your baggage allowance but again, ask to be sure. Before leaving, remove all "extras" on your stroller like cup holders, toys and even the sunshade, depending on the model. You can either put these items in your checked bags or leave them behind. Not only can they impede your passage through security but can get lost in transit. Since you will only use it in the airport, you will not need the attached gizmos.

Usually, strollers are "gate checked" which means that you will be given a tag on check-in but you can keep the stroller with you until you get to the door of the aircraft. Sometimes they give the passenger the tag to put on themselves. Some are a little complicated (the tags that are like stickers) so do not hesitate to ask them to do it instead. Make sure it goes somewhere it will not be squished or hidden when the stroller is folded.

If you have a "travel system" (the stroller with infant bucket car seat inserted inside), the stroller and car seat portions will each need a gate tag. If you have a seat for your baby and you know that the car seat can be used on the flight, no you will not need to tag the car seat. Do put the tag on it if you are hoping to get an empty seat and are not sure you will be able to use it on board. This will save time at the gate.

You will leave your stroller either at the door of the aircraft or at the bottom of the stairs if you do not have a jet way and are boarding outdoors from the tarmac. Never try to bring a stroller on board

an aircraft unless instructed to do so by a crew member. Yes, I have occasionally stuffed a very small umbrella stroller into a first or business class closet, or in economy, when the flight was half empty but this is the exception, not the rule. If this does happen, do not expect it on every flight.

Metal luggage carts and strollers are not allowed in overhead bins for safety reasons. Even if the crew does not notice. Shockingly with some airlines, it is allowed, but please do not even try this. First of all, this will not make you popular with your fellow passengers. Stowage space is at a premium and taking up so much of it with an item that you do not need for the flight will not go over well with your neighbors. More importantly, metal objects have come crashing down on passengers' heads, especially during disembarkment. You will be careful because you know it's there but someone two rows back will be in a hurry, grab their bag, which will hook on your stroller and next thing you know, it's come down on some little old lady's head. Let's just keep that from happening!

When you leave the stroller, attach the straps and fold it yourself. Some passengers have amusingly left their open strollers for us to fold up for them. Some Flight Attendants will not be so entertained and you probably do not want someone fiddling with your stroller who does not know what they are doing. So that your stroller is not mishandled or left behind, please make sure it is all packed up.

An excellent tip given to me was to bring a bungee cord and double secure it before leaving it at the door. This can be the same bungee cord you used to secure your car seat to the stroller. Most strollers are only held closed with a small latch, often one that is easy to flip open. Your stroller is more likely to be damaged by popping open en route than how it is treated. You do not want some time-pressed baggage handler trying to pack it back up.

The strollers are usually kept in the hold along with wheelchairs, so it is supposed to be gentler to gate-checking them. It also, in theory, should be cleaner. I will say that I have never seen the strollers at the arrival gate in bad shape.

If you want to put your stroller in a bag at the gate, by all means you can. Make sure you have a gate tag on the bag. Some strollers actually have specific bags made for their models you can buy. I personally use a camping duffel bag, which works just as well and is sturdier than most the stroller companies sell.

On larger aircraft, passengers disembark from more than one door but strollers and wheelchairs will be placed by only one of them. Either listen to the welcome announcement when the plane arrives at the gate, or tell a crew member that you have a stroller and which way to disembark to collect it. If you exit the wrong door, you may have to walk all the way around to find it.

If you are connecting, usually the stroller is returned between flights. Ask about this during initial check-in to be sure. Once, when flying alone with a newborn and two toddlers, one airline informed me that they wouldn't return the stroller at a major airport, forcing me to connect without one. I did ask that a supervisor be called and after a bit of negotiation, they only accepted my stroller because of its small size. I also pointed out that stowage wouldn't be a problem since it was a combination car seat which I used onboard. For future flights, I avoided booking with the airline and have not flown them internationally since.

18. Getting Car Seats Through Airports

If you have an infant bucket-style seat, it may fit in the travel system you already have. You can take the whole contraption to the door of the plane and gate-check the stroller, while bringing the car seat on board.

If yours is not part of a travel system, you can use a stroller frame. Something like this (please note that I am not promoting any of these sites. They are all simply examples to show you):

http://www.drugstore.com/products/prod.asp?pid=167395&catid=110448&aid=335933&aparam=graco_snugrider_stroller&CAID=94277ef3-f710-4efa-9c68-95b932c2dace

This can be gate-checked just like a stroller.

Most infant carriers do not need the base for installing in an aircraft but check your owner's manual to be sure of this (there are one or two exceptions). You can either carefully pack it in your checked bags or a better option might be to leave it at home. If you will only be gone a short time and/or you will not be in the car much, the inconvenience of hauling the base around might override the inconvenience of installing the seat in the car each time. Be sure you are comfortable with the seatbelt installation before leaving, either way.

Another option, expensive but convenient, if you fly a lot, is the combined car seat/stroller. I received this as a second baby gift: <http://www.lillygold.com/>.

I actually loved it but you have to really use it to justify the price tag. It was great for other kinds of travel. When we drove on vacation, we didn't have to pack a stroller. I used it a lot in cabs. I was also able to convince some foreign airlines to let me bring it onboard since it collapses (not a problem on U.S. companies since it is FAA approved).

I could also use the tether when installing it rear-facing in the car.

There are some drawbacks:

- The price. At US\$200, it is definitely a luxury baby travel product.
- The top shoulder slots are very low, as is the back of the seat. Even though officially, it goes to 40lbs/18 kilos, your child will probably outgrow it a lot sooner.
- Some parents do not like the fact it's so low to the ground.
- Some car seat technicians are not happy with the install in certain cars.
- The basket is very small and you can't hang things off the handles very well.
- The back is not adjustable.

To sum it up, this should not be purchased in lieu of either a good stroller or car seat. Consider this if you either will really use it and travel a lot or simply, have money to burn!

For "convertible" seats, or those seats that sit the child upright and go to 40lbs/18kilos or beyond, transporting might be a bit more complicated. You are not going to be able to take one of those large luggage carts, the kind you rent, through security, even pleading that you have a car seat to take. Have a way to transport your car seat from after you check-in. You can take the large luggage cart up to the security line but I find it much easier to organize this while I am checking in. There can be a lot of people outside security, saying good bye, etc. and I do not want to fuss with my things at that point. Once my luggage is gone after check-in, I find these carts too big anyway and get rid of them there. I then roll the car seat to security, through the line and up to the X-ray machine.

A market for car seat-toting products has cropped up. This is not an exhaustive list!

These products attach the car seat to a suitcase with handle and wheels.

http://www.amazon.com/Traveling-Toddler-Attach-Rolling-Carry/dp/B000JHN3AS/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=generic&qid=1206809052&sr=1-1

http://www.amazon.com/TOTEaTOT-Travel-accessory-for-children/dp/B000H7VM04/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=generic&qid=1206809140&sr=1-2

I have a few concerns:

- The handle was probably not designed to hold the significant weight of a child and a car seat. If it breaks the handle in the middle of the airport, you will have the triple problem of how to transport your suitcase, car seat and child through the airport.
- I can't recommend bringing a roll-on bag for a carry-on when flying with children. I prefer a backpack with or without a diaper bag. These types of suitcases are convenient for business people but not

parents who need something they can put at their feet and get to what they need in a hurry.

This is a more solid product: http://www.gogobabyz.com/products/gogo_kids.html

The biggest drawback is the price. I have also heard complaints about the screws that attach the car seat, getting them in and out. It also does not fit all models of car seats. I have seen this "in action" and it did roll very nicely.

There are several versions of products that make the car seat into a backpack.

<http://www.onestepahead.com/product/osa/363756.html>

This is good if your child need to sit in the stroller for most of the time. If he or she walks, you can transfer the car seat into the stroller sometimes.

Which is another alternative. Some parents manage to attach the car seat to the stroller with bungee cords. Depending on the model of car seat and stroller, other alternatives include fitting the car seat into the stroller or even putting a folded car seat in the basket.

The only foldable FAA approved car seat that I know of is the Radian 65 and 80. I have the 65 and I simply attach mine to a small, all metal, foldable luggage cart. There are lots of different designs. Mine is a relic from the first airline I worked for. I recommend the kind that are all metal and have a telescopic handle. The handle is less important but avoid ones with plastic bases. They break too easily (experience speaking). This is the idea:

<http://yjsh.manufacturer.globalsources.com/si/6008823364313/pdtl/Luggage-cart/1000995752/Light-weight-Luggage-Carts.htm>

I use an extra bungee cord but other parents get creative with the LATCH straps. My toddler can even ride in it. I will admit this is a better alternative for a child who will mostly be walking. If we have a stroller, I fold it up and check it.

The first time I saw this on the net, I thought it wouldn't be secure and safe. You want to try anything out at home first. Make sure it works and will not come loose. The fact is that with children, you are usually walking at a pretty slow pace indoors, often on carpets.

19. Baby Carriers

The best-kept secret to making flying, traveling and quite frankly, parenting easier is probably to have a good baby carrier. The selection today is huge and asking someone what their favorite carrier is, is like asking them their favorite toothbrush or perfume. A good carrier by definition should go to

age 2 or 3. It's highly personnel but there are some features that make flying specifically much easier with some models.

When I worked, I saw too many babies draped over parents' shoulders as they exited the plane. Also, never leave a baby (not matter how well he or she sits up) alone sitting on a luggage cart while you get your bags off the belt. It's simply impossible to push a stroller and a luggage cart at the same time through customs. Sometimes babies cry in the air and they just need to be walked around the cabin a little bit...without straining your arms and back. A good baby carrier is the answer to all of the above.

The whole subject of carriers is well covered on the internet. These are two good sites which have comparison charts and products from a variety of companies.

<http://peppermint.com>

<http://kangarookorner.com>

Other "real life" resources include local La Leche groups or other breastfeeding support organizations. I found some once at a women's health clinic. There are also "baby wearing" organizations offering support and information on this subject. It's a nice luxury to touch and try on the products. There are many work-at-home parents producing them at reasonable prices if you are looking for something unique and want to support a good cause.

Here is an overview of your choices:

Slings-I think they are ideal for flying and what I used. A good sling can also serve as a baby changer, sun shade, a breastfeeding cover-up and a blanket. They are easy to take off and on. Some have padding along the sides which makes them easier on bigger babies and toddlers (does not cut into their legs) but makes the sling more bulky. Unpadded slings fit well into backpacks. Some parents Do not like the one-shoulder carry but it's possible to shift to the other shoulder. There is also a definite learning curve so you need to be comfortable with its use long before traveling. I could slide a sleeping child easily between a car seat, stroller and bassinet, leaving it behind as a blanket.

Pouches-Similar to slings but instead of rings, they are basically just tubes. Similar advantages and also one-shouldered, the fit is very important. Some are adjustable and others sized to order. The "look" appeals to some more than a sling and they are slightly easier to "master".

Wraps-I loved my wrap and found it more comfortable to wear but I didn't use mine for flying. It was more complicated to take-off and on. Wraps are simple, just a long piece of material but there's definitely a learning curve so it's not the product to buy two days before you fly. If this is what you

use and you want to take it flying, by all means do so but be really comfortable with it before approaching any aircraft.

Front packs-These are dire and I see far too many parents wearing their children this way. They tend to be expensive and heavily marketed. The problem is that the child is held in one rigid position (facing forward or backwards), basically hanging by its crotch. The weight is hung off the parents' shoulders making these carriers very uncomfortable quickly. They often have many fiddly straps, snaps and buttons, making transferring the child into a car seat, stroller or bassinet very difficult. Breastfeeding is virtually impossible in this and when it can be managed, isn't very discreet. I had one of these with my first child and it was in the closet by the time he was six months old. I wish I had been warned what a poor value they were!

Mei Tai's, Ergo, Becco and other carriers with straps- These are much more logical options to front packs. They look similar but the way they hold the child is entirely different and much more comfortable. Most last until at least age two and can carry an older child on the back too. Babies can still sleep in them and they can be used for breastfeeding. I have no direct experience with them

Backpacks-If you have an older baby or toddler, are not flying very far and need the backpack at your destination, this might be a practical option. They are difficult to put on and take-off. The child can't sleep in them very well and when not in use, they tend to be bulky and hard to put away. I did opt for this once when visiting a big city where it was going to be needed. I recommend removing the sunshade if possible. It's much easier to have the kind that can stand on their own on the ground, than those you have to balance on your knee while putting on, like what I had. Some even have wheels and the option of being pulled. This could then be used instead of a stroller.

Just as a reminder, if your child is flying in your lap, never have him or her attached to you in any way. They are safer loose in your lap. Many of these carriers easily detach from the back. As a Flight Attendant, I simply had the parent lean slightly forward and I was able to unhook or unsnap the carrier. With a sling, I could simply loosen it and flip the back part over my head. It's not necessary to completely remove it. For an emergency evacuation, you would not need it and seated for take-off, it's not necessary to have them attached to you anyway.

20. Security

For even little veteran fliers, this can be the scariest part of flying. Even if your children have done it before, it's best to discuss the security each time. They may have forgotten (little memories can be short) and it may seem very different to them than even just a few months ago.

Discuss that all toys, backpacks and even shoes have to go on the belt. Explain that they will have to walk through the metal detector arch one by one but they will never be truly separated from you.

Once my children were a little rattled by just hearing a different accent. Even though the security agent was very nice, they had never heard an Irish brogue before. I was shocked to see them clinging to their stuffed animals as he coaxed ever so gently to place them on the belt. So even a small change, for example, if your child went through the airport when it wasn't so busy if your child experienced security at a smaller airport, you may see a different reaction than before.

Many security agents are now well-trained in how to deal with the public, especially in special circumstances like with small children.

Even if you are not flying to, in the U.S. or even on a U.S. company, you may find this link from the TSA helpful: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/children/index.shtm>

In some airports, they are experimenting with specific "family" lines. Are these more convenient? Better? The jury is still out. I have only been through one once when the airport wasn't very busy so I do not feel my opinion is valid. I like the idea of not having a hurried businessperson pushing behind me but then again, it would be frustrating if there were a disorganized family in front of me. If you are not short on time, this might be a good idea to try it out (and let me know what you think later on!)

The first item I put on the belt is the stroller and/or car seat. Then I place my bags, the last of which is that with my valuables. Then I get the children to place their things. By the time I get through the metal detector, my belongings are usually waiting for me. I push them all the way to the end of the belt to get out of the way of other passengers and also to make it easier if they want to do an extra security check. I put the bag with the valuables on first, grab the stroller and/or car seat and then start to put my things together.

If the security people want to do an additional check of any of our bags, I insist they come over to where I am. They have always cooperated since logically, I am clear of the busy area already. The passenger is required to be present for the inspection but do not feel obligated to stop doing everything. I will still throw my and my children's things together at the same time. I just need to keep looking at them and what they are doing. Some security people try to not remove items and/or replace them. I realize they are trying to be helpful but I actually find this more time consuming. I offer to almost empty my bag. This way, they can look at everything and then I chuck it all back in myself, since I know where it goes and how to make it fit better.

If removing our shoes was necessary, putting them back on is my last priority. Often there are chairs placed at the end of security for this purpose. I have everything organized and move it all near those chairs before I face putting on all the shoes. Some flying tips suggest you pick footwear specifically for the Security check. I personally would recommend practical, comfortable shoes for everyone, even if they take a minute more to put back on. Airports involve a lot of walking and wearing the wrong shoes for the sake of saving two seconds getting through Security does not seem logical to me. My pumps would be the easiest shoes to put back on but I have no intention of ever flying with them on, now that I am no longer required to do so for a living!

21. Boarding

I recommend feeding and changing any babies and visiting the restroom between security and boarding. It might be a long time before you get the opportunity again. Be aware that some boarding areas do not have any facilities so think of these issues while walking down the hall, before arriving at the gate. Some airports have additional security checks right at the boarding gate and usually, you can't pass back out once you've gone through it.

Because of these extra security checks and the fact that boarding gates can be further than expected, give yourselves enough time to get to the gate. As you pass each screen with the boarding gates listed, check again and again. Airlines reserve the right to change gates at any point and it's the passengers' responsibility to get to the right one.

There are two types of boarding procedures. If you are flying with a medium or large aircraft from a bigger airport, you will probably use a jet way and simply walk directly into the airplane.

If you are taking a smaller aircraft, sometimes even from major airports, you may be boarding directly from the tarmac using "air stairs". In any cold and/or wet weather, you need to keep your coats. Usually, you board from a bus which takes you to near the aircraft. Even if it's only a few hundred yards, they will make you take the bus and often stuff them to the brim with passengers. I have had to walk down stairs to get to these buses, which isn't convenient with a stroller and babies.

When you ride these buses, you will not be going very far or very fast and they Do not have seatbelts so there is no need to install any car seats. Try to keep your family as close together as possible since it's easy to lose a child in the crowd. This is not especially dangerous since you know the child is still on the bus but could be scary for them. I put my youngest on my lap and keep the other two close. If you have a stroller, you may want to fold it up at this point and get it out the other passengers' way.

Once the bus stops, you then have to get yourself and your child up often very rickety air stairs. Do not let older children go ahead. Keep everyone together. They will probably have you leave your stroller at the bottom of the stairs, perhaps on a cart. Throw your bags over your shoulder, put your baby in a baby carrier and try to keep your hands as free as possible. Hold on and take your time getting up. It serves no purpose to rush since there are probably more busloads of passengers coming. If it's open seating, grab the first group of seats you want as soon as possible, throwing your bags and children to "hold" them. Do not wander around looking for better seats. It's not worth the effort and you could end up separated.

If you are flying with more than one adult, many parents split up getting on the aircraft. This is a more practical option if you are boarding directly from the terminal with a jet way. I would not recommend it if you are being bused to your aircraft.

It works like this; one parent gets onboard with the bags, car seat, etc., first, usually with the crowd. They then install the seat (if they have one), put away a few bags and at the end of boarding, the children arrive with the other parent, everything sorted and they only have to take their seats. This allows the child(ren) to have a bit more time to run in the terminal and reduces the time they have to sit. The early-boarding parent also gets to organize without being distracted by their children. Another plus, if there is a seating problem, the early-boarding parent can perhaps sort it out before the rest of the family arrives. If you decide to do this with a diapered child, have the parent staying with the child keep the diaper bag. They might need it if something happens in the interim and the child has to be changed before getting on the aircraft.

I also do not recommend sending the lone adult ahead with open seating since it may be difficult for one parent alone to hold the seats for the entire family, and nearly impossible if they need to install a car seat at the same time.

22. Installing the Car Seat

First you need to decide if you have to carry your car seat down the aisle or if you can get it down the aisles on whatever wheels you are using. If you used the stroller, you have to leave outside the aircraft so automatically you know it has to be carried. If using wheels, your seat might be too large to fit down the aisle, especially if you are seated in economy. Only the skinniest seats will make it. Remove the child and/or any carry-ons before getting on board. The seat on wheels might sail through business class but get stuck between economy seats. Even if it fits through economy seats, it might get wedged trying to get by the galley. Decide if it's just easier to carry it the whole way instead of having to stop and pick it up. Depending on the kind of wheels you are using, you may have to remove them or pick the entire thing up as one unit.

If you are carrying the car seat the whole way, it might be easier to turn it upside down in an "L" position and place it over your arm. Never carry a car seat by the internal straps that hold the child but you can use the tether strap, which is designed for this kind of stress. Some people find it easier to hold the tether strap over their back. Please be careful of the hook on the end, which could fly free and hurt someone or get caught. You may want to adjust the strap accordingly ahead of time.

Once you get to your seat, as mentioned earlier, you should be familiar with the seatbelt installation of the car seat. Have your manual handy. Remember that your seat does not have to go by a window but it can't block another passengers' access to the aisle. If there is a problem with this, immediately contact a Flight Attendant.

Most seats install better if you start with leaning the seat back. Push the button and push the seat back all the way. Then, look for the seatbelts. They often get caught on the side so make sure they are pulled all the way out. Pull the buckle (often referred to as the "female" part) to its maximum. Now thread the belt through the path of your car seat. Make sure the straps are flat. Pull the belt and lastly, put the seat back into the full upright position.

Airplane seatbelts are designed differently than those in your car so you can run into problems with the buckle placement. First, try flipping the buckle upside down to make it flatter. If that does not work, it might be a good idea to ask for a seatbelt extension. These are the belts they use for larger passengers, similar to the one the Flight Attendants use during the safety demonstration at the start of the flight. The buckle may not line up the same way as it does in the car. For example, it may fall on an awkward area on the side of the seat or the child can feel the buckle in his or her back even if this never happens in the car. The extension gives you two buckles which you can adjust and reposition as needed.

Remember to stow whatever cart you used to transport the seat either on the floor or in a closet. Please Do not place them in overhead bins as they have caused some serious injuries when other passengers have removed their things from the same bin, especially at the end of the flight.

If installing the car seat rear-facing, you may encounter objections from the person in front who then cannot recline their own seat. If there is a free seat in the row in front of you, try to install your seat behind it. I actually coordinated with those in front of us once and they were happy to cooperate. Install the seat first and have the person in front try to crank his seat back. Often, it does actually work anyway. Infant bucket-style seats are usually not a problem but "convertible" seats, those going to 40lbs. or beyond, might be more the culprit when installed facing backward. You may also encounter more problems on charter flights with very close pitches between rows.

There is a solution which I consider to be a "desperation" measure and not exactly condoned by car seat technicians (although they haven't jumped on me yet!). If it's a long flight, you may consider turning the seat forward-facing for the "cruise" portion of the flight after take-off and then turning the seat around and reinstalling it backwards for landing. In my opinion, this is not a huge safety compromise because the biggest threat in the air, unlike a car, is turbulence, not forward impact. Airplanes usually bounce up and down in turbulence and rarely jerk forwards. I would only recommend reversing the seat if you are faced with the true wrath of the passenger in front of you on a really long flight.

More and more children are wisely being kept rear-facing in cars for longer and longer to keep them safer and reducing any injuries. Some parents do not want to turn the seat forward facing in airplanes on principal because that their children are accustomed to always facing backwards. Flying is really a different situation and the only time I turned the car seat around for this reason, my child did not object when I re-installed the seat rear-facing for landing and later, she was fine facing backwards again in the car.

If your child is very young, about six months or less, you need to pay attention to the angle of the seat. Most small babies fly in infant seats and this does not apply. This is specifically if you are flying with an infant in a convertible seat which can be used to toddler hood. Sitting too straight in the forward position could restrict his or her oxygen intake and remember that the oxygen content of airplane air is already reduced. Some seats have a guide (usually a colored bent bar on the side with a small metal ball inside) to maintain the right angle for rear-facing babies. Consult the owner's manual for your seat and your child's pediatrician before opting to do this with your younger baby.

Issues, Conflicts and Disagreements Onboard

When things do not go according to plan, and you are flying with children, things can heat up even faster than if you were alone for a number of reasons.

Some issues can be avoided by asking and making requests in advance. Be sure of your seating arrangements. If your agent couldn't sort it out, contact the airline yourself, several times if necessary. Make sure you do not leave the check-in counter without confirming any bassinet, special meal and seating requests.

If it's a seating problem that hasn't been resolved before boarding, try to sort it out yourself. Passengers tend to refuse seating requests made by Flight Attendants. When they are actually talking to the inconvenienced passenger, with their little ones, it can be difficult to refuse. Once, while

asking about a seat exchange myself, my son, who was in a separate seat, burst into tears. While he didn't mean to do it for dramatic effect, it was then very difficult for the other passengers to say no.

If they do trade with you, thank them profusely and do point it out to the crew. I liked to know if a passenger did a good deed and therefore made my job that much easier.

Car seat issues were covered earlier but again, try to bring paperwork to support the "case" for your seat.

You may be faced with an inexperienced crewmember, or by contrast, someone who has been flying for awhile but is not up-to-date on the rules. Safety training is usually every six months to a year so if there were changes made, either the Flight Attendant hasn't read his or her literature or has simply been on vacation, leave or maternity. Try to be patient and ask them to consult their manual. They are required to have it on board for every flight, updated and while they do not have to memorize all its contents, they should be able to find relevant information.

Ask to speak to a purser before things get heated. If you are still on the ground, it might be wiser to consult a ground agent. They can come onboard if necessary.

Try to keep things civil and remember that eventually, you have to "cooperate" with the crew in most parts of the world. This rule is taken very seriously by the airline and if things get heated, that alone could justify you are being "off-loaded". If it's very severe, especially if there's a later flight and you are flying off-season, this may be a real option so ask if you will accept this option.

More information about complaining to the airlines is found towards the end.

23. Ears and Altitude

It is actually a myth that children need to suck on something for take-off and landing. I see this "tip" in almost every article on this subject and I think it's a case that it's repeated so often that everyone believes it (Emperor's New Clothes, anyone?) Some go into minute detail on what you are supposed to do to make them swallow during those times, what to give them, rub their throats, make them drink, etc.

Is this bad advice? Not usually. Where is the harm in giving your child a drink or some gum during those times? Nothing... except take-off is when a lot of children do nod off. Panicked parents wake their children from much-needed-shut-eye to save their ears from supposedly exploding. Also, parents will pull their babies safely snuggled in car seats so that a breast or bottle can be shoved in their

mouth. These are the two most critical points of the flight, safety-wise so please keep your child safely in his or her seat...and please just let them sleep!

If a small baby falls asleep and wakes up to uncomfortable pressure, he or she will cry, which is the best way to clear ears. I have done this as an adult when my ears were still blocked hours after working a flight, a desperate measure when you live in an apartment.

I rarely saw children or adults having problems with their ears in my 13 years as a Flight Attendant. With all the flights I have done with my own children, I have never, ever done anything special for their ears during take-offs and landings and even though my oldest had a history of ear infections, we have never had any tears or discomfort.

ENT specialists simply recommend that the child is awake for landing:

<http://www.entcda.com/AAOHNSF/earsandaltitude.htm>

The delicate time is not during take-off or landing/touchdown but at the top of descent. Be very careful as most articles on flying are written by parents who usually have never worked in the industry and misuse airline terms. This is usually 40 minutes to an hour before landing and everyone's ears have to reverse internal pressurization. You can feel this yourself. I can confirm that when I worked, if any passengers had ear problems, this was the time, and I actually saw more adults suffering than children.

Airplanes also do not consistently fly at the same height. For a number of reasons, traffic, weather, etc. on a longer flight, you may feel the aircraft changing cruising altitude while in the air. Usually, you can feel this both with the aircraft's movements and with your own ears. Again, do not panic and do not worry about their ears if this happens either.

If your baby has an ear infection, no amount of sucking will relieve the pain. To avoid ear issues is to take your little one to the doctor a few days before flying. Just schedule a "well-baby" visit to coincide with your trip or arrange a quick visit for an older child. My son was good at getting symptomless ear infections. Do not skip doing this because your child hasn't recently had a cold and/or they do not have symptoms and assume their ears are fine. Yes, antibiotics will take effect before you leave so it will not result in a cancellation of your trip even if there is a problem. The doctor will look in your child's ears and make sure they are clear and infection-free. Healthy ears can handle pressurization changes.

Flying with an ear infection can be very, very painful and just giving them some gum or a drink will not prevent it from happening. Permanent ear damage can result and it wasn't because the child was or wasn't made to "suck" during "take-off" and "landing"!

Remember too that small babies often cry during boarding. This is a disruptive time and children pick up on the stressful atmosphere. They usually settle down once everyone's seated. The airplane is often hot because the air conditioning system does not work at full force until the plane is airborne. You may have had problems with seating, security or it's simply been a long day with connections and travel to the airport. Do not be discouraged and think "We are off to a bad start". If they are fussy and/or crying, this is normal.

My baby was crying once during this time and a Flight Attendant came up to me to tell me that it was "her ears". We were still on the ground!

24. Turbulence and Other Safety Issues In-flight

Please do not be tempted to place children on the floor. Ouch - their poor little heads in turbulence... Do not even place them on the floor with the logic that you would pick them up if it gets rough. Turbulence can hit quickly without warning. If your children fall asleep in their seats, put the seatbelt around them so it can be seen. If you all are sleeping (we can always hope) and the seatbelt sign goes on, the Flight Attendants are supposed to come down the aisle to check. If they can clearly see that everyone is strapped in, they will not have to wake you up.

Toddlers are actually the most difficult age. They love to run, hate to be confined and most are just a little shorter than those heavy, big carts the Flight Attendants are pushing up and down the aisles. We did make an effort to pull them through the cabin two at a time but not always possible and you do not want your child getting hit by one. Make an effort to keep your child out of the aisles where there is a meal service going on and especially right after one has finished. Often we had to reposition carts right after we finished.

Keep children out of the galleys and do not walk into another class of service, even to simply walk through. Do not pass any curtains.

But feel free to get up and walk around. If turbulence hits, grab on to something with one hand and your child with the other. If it's really rough, evaluate if it's safe to return to your seat. If the flight isn't full, feel free to take an empty seat until it's safer to get up. If not, the floor is another option. Sit down in the aisle with one hand on a hand-rest and the other around your child. Remember that

turbulence is not necessarily dangerous, except for the fact that you could get injured shaking around. Explain to your child if he asks that it's like waves of a ship.

25. In-flight Toys and Ways To Occupy Small Children

Please only bring silent toys. Even a slight beep or peep can drive your fellow passengers nuts on a long haul flight. Do not risk their wrath. Toys from a certain fast-food chain are particularly evil.

Some toys are not allowed in the cabin. No toys with remote controls are allowed to be brought on board. The toy itself can be brought onboard but I recommend putting the remote in the checked bags. There is also the obvious rule against any toy that looks like a weapon. No toy can contain more than 3 oz. of water...but on a practical note, I wouldn't recommend bringing any toy with any water at all onboard.

Here are toys which are simply bad ideas to bring on board. Anything that has multiple parts, all of which all are needed for it to be played/function, and/or anything delicate and/or valuable.

For long flights, I bring a new toy as a present for each. I keep them with me until we are on board (Do not put them in the child's backpack because they are sure to find it ahead of time). When my son was small, he loved anything with wheels. I'd bring a package of small cars, trucks or airplanes. Plastic animals were also winners with my toddlers. When the girls got older, and past that magical age 3 when it seems all toys are "allowed", those small plastic dolls with rubber clothes kept them occupied. All three of them love small animals.

I like magazines too. In Europe, they usually come with a toy. They usually have a story, something to color and/or make.

Game books, including cross word puzzles were fun even before they could read. They basically only need the alphabet and Sudoku is mastered quite early too.

Some people do really creative things with onboard toys. Think about packaging them up and/or wrapping them in a special way to add to the thrill. Some parents hide a few beforehand and instead of buying new stuff, pull out the tried-and-true winners once onboard. On the same principal, you can hit a few consignment stores for "new" toys.

Probably the simplest winner is to bring is a pack of crayons (get the chunky kind for smaller children) and some paper. Just paper works but feel free to bring coloring books too. These fit easily into a

carry-on bag and it really keeps them occupied for ages. Do not go overboard. Keep it simple and easy. Do not bring a truckload of stuff they will hardly notice and you will have to lug around.

If your child is old enough to enjoy checkers or chess, please take the kind of miniature games which use either magnets or pieces which plug into the board. Bring extra pieces if possible.

Books are welcome on board. No one should mind you reading quietly to your child(ren) in your seat(s). I especially like those flat, colorful, cheap books sold in U.S. drugstores. I also like the coloring books with a story. You can read him or her the story, and then let them color the pictures before or after.

My origami repertoire is actually very limited but it was amazing how many paper cranes and frogs could keep my children occupied. Origami papers are usually inexpensive and easy to pack. Bring a book or print up instructions off the net and learn it together on board. Keep any paper airplanes from taking flight but the frogs hop nicely across tray tables...

26. Electronic Items

Before leaving home, make sure anything electronic is fully charged. It's rare that these items can be recharged onboard, although this is possible on the ground while waiting for a connection. If you are flying internationally, make sure you have a converter for whatever type of plug is at not only your destination but also your layover locations. For example, if you are going from Europe to Australia and stopping in U.S., make sure you bring the plug converter for both North America and Australia. These are small, not very expensive items and you may be very grateful you do not have a sad-faced child staring at you, unable to play his favorite game because you couldn't recharge his gadget. You usually do not need a transformer even if they electricity is different.

Portable DVD players are popular. Because they are expensive, I am hesitant to recommend them. I waited until my youngest was 3 1/2 before I used one for the first time. I imagined my children fighting over it, dropping it, spilling drinks on it, etc. I honestly do not think they are necessary for any flight three hours or less. Very young children aren't good about wearing the headphones. My children prefer the kind that have a stiff band over their head. The small ones that stuff in the ear do not work very well with children. Experiment at home to see if your child will wear the head phones for extended periods. Another option is having the child watch the imagines without sound. Even if you turn the sound down low, this will annoy neighboring passengers so make it clear this that the headphones must be used on the airplane. You may want to never play the sound out loud so that your child is not aware that the sound can be played through the speakers at all.

A portable computer can serve the same purpose. It's heavier than a DVD player and you may have conflict if an adult is planning to work on something while the child is clambering for Barney. The battery life too, isn't usually good on them but check your equipment before deciding either/or to bring.

If flying with a toddler, look for a feature in your DVD player that folds the controls away from fiddly fingers so that they only can see the screen. For long flights, get one with a long battery life, at least 5 hours. In the store, they explained to me that it was possible to order a second battery so that they could be exchanged when the first one runs out. You may need to order a second battery to take along if you already have a DVD player with a shorter battery time. I decided this was too complicated and opted for a long-term battery instead. I am mentioning this as a possible option but I can't speak from experience. Either way, learn to turn the light down to save battery time (mine calls it "night mode") and Do not be surprised if the battery does not last as long as it's supposed to, just like car mileage...

I bring a brand new video they have never seen before. This once backfired when it turned out to be too scary so try to go for a sure winner, and not make my mistake.

Our DVD player has plugs for only two headphones so I had to buy an adapter allowing a third (although it's rare all three watch together). Check how many plugs you have and even if it's unlikely all your children will watch at once, be prepared for a bored school child to watch a "baby" video simply out of boredom. Plug adapters are not expensive and easy to bring, as are extra headphones, a good idea if one gets stepped on or lost. The headphones the airlines for their in-flight entertainment use are usually incompatible with personal electronic products.

Before leaving, we talk about the fact that while we are watching the video, we try not to laugh out loud or to poke the other and make comments. We also do not sing along to the songs. We bring sippy cups so that there are no "open" drinks sitting on wobbly tray tables next to the portable DVD player. A sports bottle can work if sippy cups are no longer used by your offspring. All rules are discussed before each and every flight. I do not assume they remember every rule for each journey.

For international travel, a portable DVD player or computer is a good idea if you are going somewhere that the DVD's are "zoned" differently. They can still watch their favorites from home while away, without having to de-zone anything. If you are going somewhere with a different language, television options may be limited and they can still watch their videos instead. You may want to explain that they have to watch their videos from home only on the machine you brought and not on your hosts' DVD player. They are also useful for the car, if you have any long journeys planned while away.

Remember too, that anything with a remote control will not be allowed onboard. Any remote for the DVD player is simply not necessary. Those robots, cyber dogs and dinosaurs are delicate, and checking them is probably not a good idea. My son wasn't the only one with one tucked under his arm in the airport once. The remotes were all in the checked bags. Many have of these toys have a switch which makes them move automatically. Not as fun as having the remote but they still were able to play with it onboard (once the seatbelt sign is off). Just please Do not turn it on if it barks or roars.

If your child asks why all electronic products have to be turned off for take-off and landing, here is a simple explanation. The only problematic electronic items are actually those which draw in outside signals. Originally, when I started flying, we were told to look out for specific products. Well, these items became more and more sophisticated and complex, taking on more and more tasks. Most Flight Attendants do not have Master's degrees in electronic engineering and basically, we didn't have time to analyze each and every one. Basically, simply for practical reasons, it's just simpler to ban all products during take-off and landing. Assure them that it's not for very long.

If your child has a cell phone, double check that these are shut off because it could ring in-flight. Some have game options or other activities but I would recommend that they remain off for the duration of the flight. Do not have an uncomfortable incident onboard if a Flight Attendant sees it being used. Messaging is also banned in-flight.

For Nintendo Game Boys, DS machines and other electronic games, make sure your children shut them off to save battery life when not used and again, that it's clear that they are to be played silently, or with headphones onboard. A little guessing game machine keeps my son occupied for ages. Leave the really small electronic toys behind, since many do not have the option to turn off the sound and changing batteries is problematic. There are so many electronic gizmos out there: take a look and see if something will intrigue your little person, if you have no practical or moral objections to them.

Come up with a system for keeping the games safe. These small game chips can be expensive and easy to lose on an airplane. Either you the parent keep them and/or put them in plastic cases when not in use, etc. Whatever procedure you can manage, depending on the age of your child(ren).

Check seat pockets yourself before leaving the aircraft or oversee your children while they do it. This is a good routine to do while landing. Apparently putting personal items in the pockets is no longer allowed for landing. As one Purser on Southwest announced, "Make sure you have all your electronic items or the next time you see them may be on ebay!"

27. Taking Care of Your Own Needs with Babies

Some mothers flying alone with their babies have asked me how they can go to use the facilities themselves. There are several solutions. When my child has his or her own seat and is asleep in it, I would tell a neighbor where I am going and leave them strapped in safely. Once my son did wake up and a nice Turkish grandfather next to him was able to comfort him for the two minutes it took for me to return. I do admit that leaving your child alone goes against what we've been told to do as parents but with that many people around, and no where to go, your child is probably fine for the few minutes you will take. Do not do two things. For example, use the restroom, check on your child and then get a cup of tea. Also, you may want to use the restroom forward of your seat, so they can see you coming back (unless in a rear-facing car seat).

If the baby is awake and you bring him or her into the lavatory, you can put him on the changer and squeeze in under. I try to keep a hand on the baby. This isn't too comfortable and can only work with a very little one. If you do not have another option, place the changing pad on the floor and put your baby down there. This is awkward but only marginally un-hygienic. If your baby can at least stand, the lavatory is small enough that you can put him or her next to you. If the flight is quiet and the Flight Attendants aren't busy, they are usually happy to hold your child while you pop inside. This usually gets the F/A out of doing "real" work for a minute and is one of the pleasanter tasks, until the little one cries. Have them hold the child stand right outside the door and you can talk to them while still inside (the doors are very thin). Do not be a masochist and think you can "hold it" until you land. That will ensure that the plane will be put in an hour-long holding pattern...or have to sit on the runway after landing because there is another aircraft at the gate.

28. Breastfeeding Tips

For the record, I flew for 13 years and breastfeed three children on many flights and I neither saw nor had any negative experiences. There have been some well-publicized incidents but when something did happen, the airline person objecting was clearly in the wrong. In many parts of the world, breastfeeding is protected by law. Contact La Leche League or other local breastfeeding support group if you want to know your local laws. I have been assured that even in parts of the world where women dress conservatively, breastfeeding in public is still accepted. One coworker who worked for a Middle Eastern airline described women whose faces were hidden but when their babies started crying, they didn't hesitate to openly start feeding them.

For nursing, I wore a dark, kind of thick shirt and took off my bra after the lights were dimmed on long-haul flights. This helps avoid some breastfeeding problems that could happen during the trip (let's skip the blocked-duct details) and it was also quicker since I didn't have to fumble with the

straps as well as simply being much more comfortable too. I make sure to put my brassiere back on before landing.

If you plan to "cover up" to do the deed, please try it at home first. I wouldn't have imagined this as something I needed to practice but my first attempts of feeding in public were thwarted when a tiny arm reached out and yanked that blanket off, leaving no mystery as to what was going on. I am not the most modest person but even this pushed my limits. A sling is better because you can secure it and is less "yank-offable" than just a blanket. Also, my babies were used to the sling, as opposed to a scratchy airline blanket. Your baby may be less an exhibitionist than just not used to having something draped over her or his head. In an even somewhat warm atmosphere, this might not be tolerated at all. Make sure whatever you will use, whether a blanket, baby carrier or specific cover-up, is lightweight, even in winter, as you will be in that climate controlled atmosphere. Do not depend on the blankets the airlines provide. They are often scratchy, heavy and/or not available. They are often removed from short-haul day flights, or not provided at all because of budget cuts.

While we never had a problem with a breastfeeding mother on board, we did once have a mother who walked up to a near-empty business class from economy and sat herself down with her baby but without asking. Please do not sit in another cabin or in a flight attendant jump seat to nurse. The problem was seating herself in another cabin, not the nursing itself. It's not necessary and could be disruptive. The mere fact that you breastfeed your baby will not give you any special privileges with seating arrangements nor are there any seating restrictions or requirements.

Sitting by the window, as I mentioned earlier, is more discreet but I only suggest it if you are traveling with family members who are occupying the other seats in your row (or even better, if they are empty!) The limited added privacy is offset with the big inconvenience of trying to get in and out of that seat with the baby.

One subject that I have no experience with, nor have ever seen is tandem nursing. This might be difficult on an airplane, especially with positioning and being discreet, so decide how to organize this in advance. Each case is unique and depends on the ages and feeding habits of each child. I'd love feedback from anyone who does have experience with tandem nursing on airplanes. Whatever you do, decide what to do ahead of time and practice it before leaving. For example, if the older child understands and will cooperate with waiting while the younger one feeds for this "special situation" and anything involving cover-ups. Expect the younger one (or twins) to nurse more than they normally do and prepare accordingly. There is no reason to wean the older one before he or she is ready, even for a long flight.

Airplane air is very dry and traveling can be very tiring. A dip in supply is almost unavoidable so be prepared. Make sure you stay hydrated and perhaps try to take it easy and/or build up your supply before leaving. Try not to over-schedule yourself before and after your flight. If you are not currently experiencing any problems, your long-term breastfeeding project should not be affected. I found my supply quickly returned to normal a day or two after arrival.

29. Bottle-feeding Tips

If your infant is bottle-fed, use the kind of bottles with disposable liners if at all possible. Traditional bottles take a lot of space and are hard to clean on an airplane due to those funky taps. Usually, you have to press the levers down to keep the water flowing and these sinks tend to be very shallow. It's almost impossible to fit a standard 8oz./250ml bottle underneath them.

I pre-measured the powder, put it in the liners, rolled the liners up and put them in a Ziploc bag. I simply added water during the journey. The problem is that giving this tip may mean changing your entire bottle system, and the liners aren't available in all parts of the world. Sometimes they can be found but are much more expensive. Think of stocking up ahead of time if you can do so, or even have someone bring some to you from another country where they are more reasonable. Rolled up bags are easy to pack in a suitcase and aren't impossible to send. If not, try to find as short a bottle as possible. Even if you child using the full 8oz., you may want to switch back to the 4oz. half sized bottles for your flight.

A tip I was given was to bring no more than four traditional bottles for those who use them. I can only pass this along as I do not have any experience, but three sounds logical; one to use, one to wash and one to prepare... and a fourth to lose!

Please wash them (or just the nipples if using the kind with disposable liners) in the bathroom and bring them to the galley for a final hot water rinse. It's easy to pick up germs from the taps and the doorknobs in the lavatories. Be careful when touching those while handling bottles. You may even want to put a paper towel or sanitizing towel of your own, over the taps and use another to open the door. It sounds paranoid, but it is not really that difficult to do.

An excellent tip someone shared but I haven't tried was to take a sponge before traveling, wet it and soak it with dishwashing soap. Leave it to dry and then cut it up into small pieces. Put these in a plastic bag and use them one by one, throwing each away after use. This could be used for any trips away from home and not just flying.

I am amazed how often mothers have just handed me the bottles to wash and prepare. Try this and you will become really unpopular with the crew. Most importantly, as there is no health advantage to warming a bottle, please get your baby used to it room temperature before you leave. This unnecessary task is especially inconvenient on the airplane, as for travel and life in general. There are items sold to warm bottles while traveling but many are made with gels, a potential problem in security.

Some mothers have been downright rude about the perfection to which their child's bottles must be warmed, sending it back several times. Once, our entire meal service was delayed because a mother chose that moment to feed her baby and the bottle had to be warmed. If you must warm a bottle, please remember that this is a favor the crew is doing for you, not a requirement. We delayed the meal service for one hungry baby but try to avoid this. No, Flight Attendants can't check bottles every five seconds so be aware of this.

Water is a concern. Bringing enough water for a bottle-fed baby might be the biggest challenge. Security usually confiscates the water bottles and you may not have time or even the right currency to buy more bottles "airside". My suggestion is to try to bring a bottle or two anyway and see if they will let it through. It's not such an expensive item that you can't say goodbye to it. No, you can't order water from the airlines ahead of time. You also are not really in a position to ask for extra since there usually isn't enough bottled water just to drink so make any requests very polite. Perhaps they will be nice but do not expect it.

The water on board planes is filtered tap. It is usually potable but if it is not, this will be clearly marked. The water on longer flights and/or larger jets is almost always drinkable. We were assured that the tanks were regularly cleaned but there was no way to confirm this. I do know we did not use the water in certain areas of the world. I have never heard of any bad incidents relating to water on airplanes so Do not adversely fear resorting to that. Airlines do take precautions with the onboard water supplies. Public safety is the airlines' top priority and it extends to food and drink. Adverse publicity would cost them heavily. Decide for yourself if you are comfortable putting airplane water in a baby bottle. You can refill the bottles in the galley with the crews' help and not have to fiddle with them in the bathrooms. Your pediatrician may need to be consulted and the age of your baby may play a role.

30. Exclusive Pumping Tips

I have been contacted by a couple of "exclusive pumpers". If you do not know what that means, you do not need to. Skip to the next section.

I actually do have some experience with this as I did pump on board, but only while working. I continued breastfeeding for four months after returning to work. I relate to the motivation behind deciding on this option. I had latching issues with two of my three children. I commend women who still want their babies to get their own milk, usually because of lack of support, information and help at the very beginning.

If you have a big flight in front of you and if it is at all possible, try to get your little one, once again, to latch and take his nourishment directly from the source. It is possible that a baby who couldn't initially is able to master this later on. This will make your life in general, easier. But most of the time, the inability to manage this was what resulted in the mother to opt for pumping in the first place.

One "EP'er" who did a transatlantic flight wanted me to urge mothers to buy an extra seat for the baby and/or travel with someone else. The most difficult problem she encountered was placing her daughter down while she pumped. It was hard to hold the baby in her lap while she did the deed.

Pumping onboard can be tricky, especially if you are flying alone with your baby a long way and/or with multiple stopovers. Most exclusive pumpers do have supply issues because pumping is not as precisely biologically regulated. It's normal for any breastfeeding mother to have supply issues after flying but it shouldn't be a reason to wean before both of you are ready. You may want to build up your supply with extra pumping before leaving. Security in the U.S. allows breast milk, even without the baby, and you should never be required to taste it, as has been reported. Print this up and take it with you if you prefer: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/children/formula.shtm>

I recommend back-up formula, just in case. If you are not already using some. Make sure you try it at home first to avoid any allergic reactions in air, or even if the baby's rejection of it. I went through numerous brands with my first baby just to find one he could keep down, let alone accept. Hopefully you will not have to use it but be prepared.

Just like other breastfeeding mothers, try to stay hydrated. Airplane air is very dry and traveling tiring so it's easy to forget to drink enough.

Make your peace with the fact that you may have to pump in your seat for practical reasons. There are some very quiet battery pumps and the airplane noise usually covers it and you will not disturb either your child or others. In fact, some EP'ers told me they managed it very discretely. You will not have anywhere to plug in your double-action electric pump anyway. Pack it very carefully in your checked bags or consider using the portable one for your whole trip.

My concern is not the pumping, or even managing the bottles but keeping the pump itself clean. Bring your own container (less than 3 oz.) of dishwashing soap. Use the paper towels and do not place any parts on the counters.

If you must pump in a lavatory, try to go during the quiet times of the flight, like during the movie. Avoid the after-meal rush. If you leave your baby asleep in his car seat, for example, tell someone nearby where you are. Do not leave the baby un-strapped. I actually do not recommend leaving your baby to pump if you are flying alone but do what you need to.

31. Baby Food Tips

Baby food is allowed through security, especially if you are flying with the child. Keep them in the original containers until you get past security, just to be sure.

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/children/formula.shtm>

If your baby is under six months old and therefore has not been introduced to solid food yet, consider putting off this step until you arrive or even return from your trip. Of course you want to discuss this with your pediatrician but mine was fine with this plan. Two of my children were started on solids at seven and a half months each and both are very good and diverse eaters, who had not problems or allergies. One was born pre-maturely and it did not affect either's weight or long-term health. In fact, it may have been better for them overall.

When I returned, it was easier to work out a feeding schedule after we had recovered from jet lag and I could organize this project better at home. Baby food is messy on board and I really suggest avoiding doing it if you can.

If you will be feeding your baby on your flight, be sure to stick to foods that your baby has been eating for at least a week. Food allergies were a reality in our family and sometimes reactions took three to four days to appear. Do not risk having a rash, indigestion or worse a day or two before flying. Remember that some very allergenic foods, such as sweet potatoes, rice, tropical fruits, strawberries, chocolate, lentils and other beans are sold for young babies. Do not go by the age marked on the label and make sure whatever food you will be feeding your baby on board are proven winners. Wait till you arrive or return to try more new foods.

Peanuts and peanut products have been removed from most commercial flights so this common and extreme allergen no longer poses a risk. Peanuts are also a risky choking item.

Bringing your homemade food should not be a problem in security but it might be a bit more complicated. Keeping it fresh might be more of a challenge. My babies were almost given exclusively homemade food but I tried a few organic jars before leaving just because it was more convenient for flying.

For warming food, you have several options. Airplanes Do not have microwave ovens for safety reasons. The ovens are usually "convection" which means there are fans in the back which force hot air through the oven, which works faster than heat alone. Most plastic will melt and all food has to be covered or it will quickly dry out. A flat, metal container works best. You can bring a container with some aluminium foil from home if you wish.

Some aircraft Do not have ovens at all. Some are small and only fly short distances. Some larger aircraft have special food carts which plug in and heat the food inside the cart itself. Usually, there is at least a small warming oven for bread but these are slow. Remember that it's possible that all oven space is taken and it is not possible to put any other item.

You can bring a dish with some aluminium foil to wrap the food in if you prefer. A flat dish works best. The toddler meals that came in one piece with two or three courses were difficult to heat up. I recommend bringing separate small baby food jars.

Ask to speak to the "galley attendant", the one in charge of the food. Different airlines have different titles but that is general enough that you should get the right person. Ask them how and when they can warm the food.

I used to warm my jars with water. I would slightly open the jar and place it in a dish of hot water. No, this does not heat it as much and as thoroughly as putting the entire thing in an oven but I got my children used to slightly less warmed food before leaving.

Feeding can be a bit messy on board. You can feed in the seat, there is no reason to bring any sort of portable high chair on board (check them in as baggage if you need it at your destination). Disposable bibs and spoons are convenient. I actually found a plasticized bib more useful than disposable. It had sleeves with elastic around the wrists. It really kept them clean and then I easily rinsed it out before the next feeding. I also brought my own Kleenexes, which were softer than those found onboard. I was also prepared to feed them in the airport if necessary.

32. Pacifiers/Dummies

More unknown territory, my children never used any sort of pacifier. I have sufficiently briefed pacifier-using parents to pass on some practical tips, as well as what I observed. Bring at least three, preferably the same brand and color. Great idea since they are so easy to lose. You might want to get your child used to those pacifier "leashes" ahead of time, if you do not already use one. Make sure the pacifiers are not on anything around their neck but instead a contraption that's clipped to their clothing so it's not falling on the floor. If it does get dirty, wash it in the lavatory and if desired, bring it to the galley to be dipped in hot water for a final sterilization.

I have to add that some parents use the flight as the opportunity to "lose" undesirable items on purpose. I know of at least one child whose pacifier just didn't make the flight. My son's bottle then didn't manage to leave California. It gathered dust under the bed as we left for the airport. If you decide you want your child to take this step with whatever babyhood hang-on, make sure you are prepared to face the consequences and that your child's really ready. The change of scenery, time zone and/or company might do the trick. One mother told me she wrapped a bottle in black plastic, taped it shut and then stuffed it on the bottom of her carry-on, just in case there was a major meltdown. The disguise was to prevent her daughter from accidentally seeing it. Mom also wisely, brought a desirable treat to offer instead, in this case, bubble gum. Her daughter found the sippy cup and the gum as acceptable replacements and the bottle was a distant memory by the time they landed. Good luck!

33. Diaper Changing Tips

Even though not all diapers smell and/or messy, it's recommended that you change every and all diapers in a lavatory. Even just seeing you changing a baby in the seat, even if it's a breastfed newborn (whose diapers have very little, even a pleasant smell) could make other passengers uncomfortable and/or draw complaints.

For changing diapers, the lavatories with changers are usually marked on the outside. People waiting in line will usually let you use them specifically and often let you go ahead of them. Be friendly and hopefully this will be your experience. Look for one in each section of the plane. For the record, I have never seen an airplane that didn't have one. I would generalize and say that most regularly scheduled airlines will have at least one on board.

They are tiny tables and will not hold even an older baby very well. Using the larger handicapped lavatory might be a better idea. This lavatory is also recommended if you have a recently potty-trained and/or multiple children. Get it all done at once!

I will mention that I did use cloth diapers, although not exclusively, with all three children. While I am a big believer in them, I did opt for disposable while flying and recommend using them, exceptionally, even for the most dedicated cloth diapering parent. I did manage to find biodegradable disposable diapers in Germany which worked well. Whatever type you use, be sure to try it a few times at home before leaving. My first child was very sensitive and prone to nasty diaper rashes and we had to try a variety of brands before finding one he could tolerate (which was one of the reasons I promote cloth).

Some airlines do have diapers on board but they were usually not as nice as what is sold in stores. Often, they are a one-size-fits-all, a claim I seriously doubt. Best to have your own ample supply. Some parents recommend "overnight" diapers for long flights.

You find that you change your child more frequently when traveling so factor that in when deciding how many to bring. Children and babies are doing more sitting and are they are more prone to "tummy" troubles while flying. Sometimes too, you find yourself changing them when you have the opportunity, rather than wait till you are standing in line for check-in, security or boarding to find out that your child really, really needs to be changed. It might make more sense to do this task when you have a moment, even if the discarded diaper isn't as full as it usually is.

Grab the moment when you can. I always changed diapers before boarding and landing. Another good time is after the meal service, when ideally, your baby will go to sleep. The quietest times for the lavatory are during the movie and just before the meal service. Remember to check for lavatories both in front and in back of you, (many "forget" that there may be more behind them) and there is usually a sign saying when their full on some planes. It's lit when they are.

As soon as you walk into any lavatory, look for where the trash is located so you can pop things in there as soon as possible. Also, there is always a handle, for turbulence. If it gets rough while you are in there, know where it is so you can grab it quickly, while grabbing your child with the other hand. I have put my hand on top of a small baby but bigger children do better being "scooped" up and held close to your body while going through rough air.

A great tip I was given was to learn to change a toddler standing up. This is easier in the handicapped lavatories on board. It's possible from when your tot can stand with support. They Do not have to be

able to walk or stand independently, just if they can lean against a wall, in the "frisk" position. The technique is to do the back side first, put a clean diaper on your lap, have them face away and lean against you, as you "take care of" the front. Sounds complicated but it is easier than fighting with a toddler to lie still and works well as the changing tables on the plane are often too small by they reach the age that they can stand. Bigger babies and toddlers hate lying down in strange places even when there is enough room, let alone when their head hits the wall.

Practice this changing-while-standing trick at home first. Remove the bottom half of the clothing first. If it's a "scary" diaper, try pinching it down as you remove it, catching as much of the "serious" stuff as possible right away. Dispose of immediately. Also, on the plane, feel free to pull out those paper towels and cover your knees and lap. It's also a really great technique when out in public in general. While in a mall or office, changing your little one more privately in a stall is easier than fighting to keep him or her lying nicely on a baby changer. It also means that you Do not have to look for baby changers any more.

Many parents like bringing their own, sometimes scented, diaper bags for disposal. They Do not take up much room in a diaper bag or carry-on so bring them if it will make the task more pleasant for you.

I read one tip to undress the baby before taking him or her to the lavatory. I really Do not recommend this for a few reasons. Airplanes can be a little cold and diapers a little smelly. Your fellow passengers might appreciate it if you keep the baby dressed until you are in the lavatory. Always bring the change of clothes, even if you are sure you will not use them. So many times either we've had a little overspill or there has been a leak where I didn't originally notice. Be prepared to put your baby in fresh clothes as soon as you have finished with the diaper.

Watch out for the red Flight Attendant call button. This is for emergencies only and the red color seems to attract little ones to tap it again and again. It may or may not ring where you are but it does light up and ring in the galley. We were required to make sure it wasn't an emergency and you will hear a Flight Attendant tapping at your door soon enough making sure no one is having a heart attack in your lavatory. Avoid this situation if you can and keep the probing fingers away...

Please make sure you discard the diaper in the trash. Sounds logical but you'd be surprised the weird places I have found them. Look for a metal flap near the sink. For the record, the lavatory and galley trash bins are discarded in different manners. Even innocent diapers are considered "bodily fluids" so please Do not hand them to Flight Attendants or throw them in the galley trash. If it's during landing, it might be easier to make use of a sick bag and simply leave it in the seat as you disembark. Explanation of why at the end of this article.

34. Crying

Many parents fret over the idea of the child crying on the plane. This actually is not a big problem overall. Babies often cry during boarding but quiet down once we are on our way. The hum of the engine usually calms them down. Your child is more likely to cry if you are seated near the crew rest area, when the crew are actually trying to rest. Haven't figured out why yet...

Your other passengers are more sympathetic than you probably realize. Most are parents themselves and know it's not so easy for you. I have honestly never had a complaint about a crying baby when the parent was obviously trying to do something about him or her. Once I had a mother who did nothing, claiming it was her baby's "ears" and there was a stampede to the galley of enraged passengers. If you use the "cry-it-out" method to put your child to sleep, please do not employ it on the flight!

I often take my red-faced screamer into the lavatory which will obviously muffle the sound. Yes, in case you are wondering, flying with children means a lot of time in the lavatories! This is a trick to use for when the baby cries during the quiet part of the flight. Obviously, it's not ideal when the lavatories are busy, for example right after the meal service. During these times, your child's cries will be less likely to disturb people anyway. Everyone's awake. When they are not, the simple change of scenery of a walk around the cabin or by diving in the lavatory can quiet a baby down, even playing with the toilet paper or water. Just keep them away from that fun red Flight Attendant call button that's in there. The nifty ringing noise it makes is the very definition of irritating back in the galley and might be treated as an emergency. We know it's usually a kid but it could be someone having a heart attack...

This is when you will be glad to have a good baby carrier. They really worked magic with my children, calming them down without strain to my back and arms. I could walk up and down, up and down, as necessary, while still having my arms free to hold on if it got rough.

As far as crying babies go, I saw a good example on a flight once. The child was bottle-fed, not a sin itself but there was a lot of jumping up and washing/preparing them on the parents' part since they had the old-fashioned hard plastic ones. Every time she peeped, and she was around 8 months old, either or both parents were shoving food, formula and/or water bottles at her. Sometimes babies just need a nice calm walk around a quiet cabin, which they never attempted and there was no baby carrier in sight. This baby woke my baby up several times and the single woman in between us was feeling like she'd won the lottery.

If I had a spare moment at work and saw frazzled parents, I'd offer to walk the baby myself. Do not

ask but maybe You will be lucky. With tight staffing though these days, I wouldn't bet on it. I once took a baby to the door of the cockpit and the pilots flashed the lights on and off for him. That will not happen today. Cockpits are locked and closed in-flight and even little passengers can't take a peek. Do not ask or beg for a cockpit visit. Even a lot of foreign carriers have nixed them too. The pilots do miss you guys but security overrides. It's awful for the F/A's to say no, especially when a lot of us have warm fuzzy memories of cockpit visits when we ourselves were children. See if you can say hi at the end of the flight.

35. Special Circumstances

If you or your child have any mobility issues, be sure to mention this when reserving. This will give you priority with certain seats and there might be a few details. Your best source of information on the subject will come from any relevant organizations you probably already belong to or know of so consult them first. Know your rights and what laws apply to your situation and bring any photocopies along. Hopefully, you will not need them. If you are flying on a foreign carrier, the laws might be very different. Find out the latest information because a lot of countries are improving access and awareness. Do not let anyone's "horror story" scare you because things might have changed.

On board, there is at least one suitable lavatory and an onboard wheelchair if it is a U.S. company. Appropriate seats have armrests that come up, or that can be unlocked in order to come up for your flight, so let them know if they have forgotten to do this.

The FAA also allows for exemption to the approval sticker, mentioned earlier, if the seat is specifically for a special-needs child. Consult the FAA advisory circular, number 23 on page 19 (which has been removed from their website, at the time of writing, but the usual link is: <http://web.nbaa.org/public/ops/ac/AC120-87A.pdf>).

While reserving, the agent might ask you detailed questions about you or your child's abilities or lack of. While you may be proud, for example, that your son can negotiate stairs alone with ease but be conservative with your responses in this time. Imagine high, slippery stairs, outdoors with a strong wind, for example. Estimate too, the time and space constraints and any tiredness from traveling which any medical condition could exacerbate. Base your responses on a worst-day situation.

It easier to ask for assistance initially and then opt out if it isn't needed, then to call for assistance at the moment you realize it's needed. Anticipate your and/or your child's needs. A late assistance request could even cause a delay. You will probably be given priority getting through customs and immigration, if that applies. Take advantage because those lines can be long and tiring for anyone.

Remember that those assisting you in the airport and onboard Do not have the same training as the people with whom you usually have contact. Be really clear about any directions. We were also given strict instructions to address all questions directly to each passenger. I had a woman bark at me after asking her daughter her meal choice "She'll have chicken. It's obvious she can't answer you". Well actually, that's not that easy to assess from the aisle and usually, the parent or companion will quickly come to the rescue if needed anyway. The point is for airline personnel not to make assumptions about anyone or anything and to acknowledge each individual. Parents are usually pretty aware of their children's' needs anyway.

Here's the TSA link on the subject:

http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1572.shtm

On a personal note, if you are wondering if you should make a trip at all, the answer is probably a resounding yes. I have seen passengers with all sorts of challenges. I actually had a passenger once who was unconscious and quite a few people with advanced illnesses. Much work has been done by various organizations to insure that airlines are ready, or should be ready, to accommodate you or your child's needs. Even if you face restrictions in your daily lives, taking to the skies and seeing new places is most likely within your reach.

36. Flying With A Newborn

Most airlines stipulate that a child must be at least a week old but different airlines have different policies. Most airlines will waive any restrictions if you have a note from a doctor saying your child is able to fly.

There are no special concerns about newborns. In some ways, they are more protected than older babies since they will not be crawling around touching things or getting hurt. If the child is breastfed, the baby has the mother's immunities.

Newborns are usually good fliers and spent most of the time sleeping. Most babies I saw flying for pleasure were at least eight weeks old. Smaller babies were usually flying for more pressing reasons, for example, after being adopted or moving.

Consider your own needs, even if your baby is in perfect health and the delivery went well. Just putting a trip off by a week or two can make the journey so much easier.

You do want to be careful of the angle of the car seat when installing because newborns have

proportionally large heads and if held at the wrong angle, can restrict or even cut off the oxygen supply. Limit transporting the baby in a car seat as much as possible and be sure to have a good baby carrier.

The biggest stumbling block for international travel may be getting the passport on time. Try to get the papers before the birth and make sure to turn them in and/or schedule the interview (depending on the requirements of your country) as soon as you can after the birth. Consider paying extra for expedited delivery.

37. Potty training and Flying With The Recently/Almost Trained

First, I recommend giving yourself a break from potty training while you are traveling. In fact, I have put it entirely off because of a trip. Sometimes, the change in environment recharges a child to make progress with this project but that happens once we arrive, not usually en route. You want to work with your child and while flying, you probably can't give it the time and attention it demands.

Many parents wonder about diapers vs. underwear, flying and their recently-trained child. This obviously depends on the child but here are a few facts to guide you. To start with, yes, I have put a recently-trained child back into diapers just for the trip and no, it didn't set us back ages in the process. Children seem to understand this is a "special situation" and will cooperate as long as it's specifically for the flight and not for the entire time they are away from home.

Your child might resist going back to diapers when you first suggest this. If they are not night trained, you will have to have some sort of "back-up" in case they fall asleep en route. Do not have your child wet him or herself during an in-flight nap, only to discover this while landing and when all the restrooms are busy or you are no longer allowed to use them.

How do you know whether it's worth the risk? First, will your child go if prompted? This means, if you can say "Let's use these toilets here because we might not be able to for awhile..." and your child cooperates, you might be able to let them go without diapers. If you hear "I Do not need to" almost every time, it would be better to be prepared. You want to avoid being in line for check-in, security or about to board and have your little one announce his needs and the fact they have to be attended to "now".

There are also some compromises. You might want to think about padded underwear or cloth pull-ups (aka "waterproof pants") to only be used only for the trip.

There are also tiny portable potties you can buy but they shouldn't be needed. Usually when flying, if

there's the time to go, you can find somewhere to do so. It's more a question of when, not where. The biggest hurdle is time. Facilities are usually available in airports and on board airplanes. You could be put in the uncomfortable position of having to discard the plastic bag of what your child has just "produced". It's light and easy to bring but only useful if your child objects to large toilets. Bring it into the toilets where you can dispose of it immediately.

Airplane toilets are very different than those found on the ground. You may also be headed somewhere with different concepts of plumbing as well. You may want to psychologically prepare your child to using a very different looking commode in a much smaller space.

Also, some of the newer aircraft have very noisy johns. This is because they use an air suction system, which makes for pleasanter smelling lavatories but could be potentially terrifying for a newly-trained child. These usually look much different than the old "blue water" style toilets so you will know immediately if you haven't encountered one before. The inside is usually dark colored and plastic, instead of inox and are deeper. When your child is done, put the lid down, have them wash their hands, exit the child from the cubical first and as a last gesture, lean back in and hit the flush. They may be more accepting if they hear it flushing before going in themselves (i.e. waiting in line). Point it out to them and it may not come as a surprise.

38. Air Sickness

People Do not get sick very often during flights. It happens but isn't that common even with children. The affected ages tend to be from around 3 or 4 to about 8. No guarantee that children outside those ages will not get sick but this tends to be the most common and I can't say exactly why. Small babies almost seem to be immune.

I was very sensitive as a child and had a terrible time on long car trips. I have been flying since I was 8 weeks old and never remember being ill on the plane. My children are also unsurprisingly very prone to motion sickness. They have thrown up on the way to the airport and then been fine on the flight. I have flown with the children on short haul flights while my husband took the car so we could save time and avoid having this problem. Yes, we actually fly to avoid motion sickness.

If your child has not flown before and has a history of motion sickness, you are not necessarily going to have an unpleasant experience. I recommend bringing wipes, a change of clothes and an empty plastic bag, which works better for children than those small paper bags the airlines put in the seat pocket. Watch your child on the ground, as the plane is taxing to and away from the gate. At larger airports, this can be quite long and similar to a car ride.

1. Try to sit your child by a window.
2. Try to sit as far forward as possible (but the window should override if you have to choose between the two)
3. If you want to use medication to prevent this, make sure it's one you have tried previously with no ill side effects or allergic reactions. All medications are stronger at altitude and most of these medicines have to be given before the onset of nausea. Read the instructions carefully.
4. Make sure your child eats and drinks before leaving for the airport.
5. Make sure your child drinks and make sure they Do not get dehydrated. Please note that overdrinking may not help anymore but could hurt. Just make sure they drink when they are thirsty.
6. A good night's sleep is helpful. I have no idea why though.
7. For take-off and landing, have your child sit calmly, facing forward and remind them to take deep breaths (this is very subjective so Do not stress it and have them simply look forward).
8. If turbulence hits, have your child stop reading and again face forward.
9. Do not let your child lead down, for example to take off shoes or dig in a bag during take-off, landing and turbulence. If the child is old enough to understand.
10. If there are problems landing at your destination (like fog or too much traffic), your flight may be put in a "holding pattern" where it turns around above the airport until it's clear to land. This can be long, an hour or more and this is especially difficult for those prone to motion sickness of all ages. The crew will prepare the cabin for landing and they will announce this. Be very careful if your flight is put into a holding pattern and just make sure you are prepared. Looking out the window and breathing can help.
11. Be aware that a too-warm cabin can make people sick. It does not need to be arctic-cold but if you are sweating in flight, tell a crew member and see if the temperature can be turned down. It is normal that the cabin feels warm on the ground and this usually can't be avoided.

If you are tempted to use medication to make your child sleep on a long flight, I would advise against this because the child might wake up dehydrated and confused and more prone to being ill.

If your child does not keep things down in-flight, get the help of a Flight Attendant as soon as possible. Do not be surprised if they will not touch anything directly. If they do, some hygienic rules prevent them from further participating in the meal services. They often do have access to chemicals and products which can make the task easier and can at least stand next to you or get you what you need. On some aircrafts, it's possible to adjust the air system to clear any smell. Airplane air is very dry so anything you clean with water will probably dry quickly. The seat cushions come up so you can pull them up to better get around them or even get another one, if available. Let a crew member help out with this.

The part of the flight when most kids get sick is right before landing. This is actually good news since the flight is almost over and you are almost off the aircraft. Clean it up best you can but Do not worry about finding a trash bin. The cleaners are quickly onboard after the passengers exist. They also have to dispose of any "bodily fluids" differently so Do not risk putting anything in the wrong container. It's better for your child to get him or her on to solid ground as soon as possible.

39. Sleeping Medications for Children

As a Flight Attendant, I saw this many, many times. Usually it worked. Twice it went terribly wrong and the child had the opposite reaction. They went completely wired onboard and it was an unpleasant experience for everyone.

I fly with my own kids between Europe and California about every six months and it is 11 1/2 hours, I am usually alone, and I have never used any sort of medication to get them to sleep. Antihistamine reactions are common in my family so I Do not risk giving them to my kids. Drug allergies and sensitivities are common with children.

A few times, I will admit, I was tempted. Two of mine are very active, not hyper, but just children who like to move. Once, my 20 month old son slept 20 minutes of that flight. I was pregnant at the time and exhausted when I arrived. Keeping your children in a drug-induced sleep through, isn't the only way to survive a long flight.

First, you need to talk to your doctor. Second, you need to try it at home first to make sure they Do not have any allergic reactions. You want to be able to get to the ER, like my parents had to when they gave me Benedryl when I was seven years old. Even though my dad was a doctor and my mom a nurse, they couldn't find my pulse...imagine if we had been in the air! Even though these are OTC drugs, they aren't harmless. Just because they didn't have an adverse affect the first time does not guarantee they will not have a bad reaction the next time.

It's probably not needed for a baby under 7 or 8 months old and I Do not think it's necessary for 3 or 4 year old, an age when they can occupy themselves in their seats better.

Remember that all meds are stronger at altitude. You know how that glass of wine goes to your head a bit faster when you are flying? Most medical emergencies I saw were because of this. It's unlikely that your small child is already on regular medications for other conditions but you need to be informed of any complications with drug combinations.

Do not give it before take-off in case of an emergency, as unlikely as that is. Of course I have had more than one "mechanical" which meant returning to the gate from the runway. A few times the passengers had to get off, which you wouldn't want to do with a drugged child (not to mention that you would already be highly inconvenienced if this happened to you).

I would also give the child the opportunity to have something to eat on a long flight and have your child awake before landing. They may wake up dehydrated and disorientated so be prepared to take care of them, which would be difficult as the plane is in the middle of touching down. It's also better for their ears if they are awake for the top of descent (see next section).

Many people are judgmental about doing this. You may want to be discreet and not discuss it openly around other passengers. I think flying with little ones can be tough and I believe strongly in doing what works for your family. Just be responsible about it.

40. Unaccompanied Minors and Children Flying Solo

The subject is flying with children but I do want to address those who are considering sending their children alone or as unaccompanied minors.

We call them "UM"s and the minimum age is usually five years old. On a few foreign companies, the age is 4 but this is rare. Not only is there the age minimum but many airlines restrict what flights and conditions with which they will be accepted. They may not allow connections, "Red-eye" flights and/or the last flight of the day, or the age minimum is older for these cases. The restrictions can get complicated and if there are several children flying together, usually they are restricted to the requirements of the youngest of the party. Be sure to read all rules before booking your child(ren) this way and usually, it is not possible to reserve for a UM over the net. You need to contact the airline or a travel agent to arrange this.

Most of the UM's I had on my flights were the children of divorced parents. This may be a requirement for travel already specified in the divorce so check if this is your situation. Some of these children were not too happy about making this journey and were not necessarily cooperative. You may want to explain this to an older child because they may observe that the airline staff are rather strict with them and advise them to not take this too personally.

Sending your child with these services is safe, reliable and taken very seriously by the airlines. I personally have never been put in a position to fly any of my children this way but I would not hesitate if I had to. I would not recommend this if it's your child's very first flight though but Do not panic if you Do not have a choice.

You must be present for check-in. Stay with your child until he or she heads for security with an assigned airline employee. Stay at the airport until the flight is listed as departed on the screen (or even better, if you can see it leave but unlikely at a bigger airport).

The person picking your child must be named and have identification. They do not have to be related but they do have to provide proof of who they are before your child is released to them. If you are sending your child to a school or camp, they probably have a procedure in place so ask.

Be aware that this is not a baby sitting service. They are escorted through the airport by an airline employee and have help with customs, immigration and paperwork formalities. When they get to the aircraft, they are handed over to the Flight Attendants who have their location marked on the passenger manifest. They keep an eye out for them, checking on them from time to time but these children aren't necessarily treated any differently than other young people on board. I recommend that your child be able to visit the restroom on his or her own without assistance as a meter of whether to send them alone.

On landing, they usually disembarked last and we "handed" them over to another dedicated airline employee to be taken through the airport either to their connection or whoever was meeting them at their destination. They may be given special instructions for landing, for example, to stay with a certain Flight Attendant and/or to wait until all the other passengers have disembarked.

What we did do is keep their passports on international flights and fill out any necessary paperwork. Please explain this to your child that this is the procedure and to not ask for their passports during the flight. Some would panic as they saw the paperwork being handed out and we would have to explain each time that we were doing it for them. Some argued and wanted to do it themselves. Sometimes I "cheated" and let them fill out a card for fun, telling them that I would add the passport number later.

Very rarely, and I have only heard of this in the Far and Middle East, there are companies which have actual escort (sorry, I can't think of a better word) services where an employee actually flies with the child. I have never seen this but I am mentioning this as yet-another possibility. Also, please Do not confuse this with a standard unaccompanied minor service but I imagine this to be a very costly option.

Rules for young fliers vary greatly from airline to airline. Most offer the UM service but not all, for example, some low cost companies Do not. Since their bookings are done almost or exclusively on line, parents have mistakenly bought tickets only to find out that their child is too young to fly on

their own with no option of sending them as UM's.

UM's can be as old as 16 or 17 years old. I did have quite a few on my flights that were that age. It's a good idea if for example, you are sending a teenager with younger siblings, if they have connections and/or are flying internationally. Making them all UM's means they stay together. Your teenager might be fine on their own but putting them in charge of younger children may be asking too much and the fee means they will have help with bags, paperwork, etc. Again, it may be a requirement if they are still a minor and flying between two divorced parents.

To fly completely on their own, without the UM service, they can be anywhere from 12-15 years old but the parents might be required to be present at check-in, possibly to sign something. I would still recommend following the procedures for a UM when letting your young one fly alone (staying at the airport, etc.)

There are also complications if say, you want to accompany your child yourself, on a separate reservation (i.e. if you are flying back earlier, having someone else bring them back, etc.) Do not reserve any part of the journey from any parties until you have straight what is and is not allowed. Unaccompanied minor fees can run as high as US\$100 so Do not be required to pay it if not necessary.

Try to avoid booking your child as an UM on an airline that does not speak his or her language. Most airlines only have one or two language speakers per flight and if they are in a different cabin of service and/or on break, your child may be left incommunicado for hours, not able to ask for a drink or where the restrooms are. They also will be able to watch the entertainment more easily if they are flying on a company that mostly speaks what they do.

41. Disembarking

We also called it "deplaning", a word you probably can't find in a dictionary.

If you can be the last off the plane, it's a good idea to do so. When a row empties near me, I send my walking kids there to get out of my way while I organize the gear and/or the non-walking child. The bottoms of the seats come up for cleaning and security purposes so I lift them up to make sure nothing is lost down there. I also take a good look at the floor and in all the seat pockets while the other passengers file off. If you are really having difficulties, see if you can "recruit" a nearby Flight Attendant. I will send my children to them while organizing the last of my things. Remember that they cannot leave their doors on the ground but they can at least keep an eye on your children for a minute or two.

Make sure you have all your documents before leaving the aircraft. One in a while, they do check these at the door of a plane arriving internationally. They will only glance at them at that point and you will still have to go through immigration as usual. Be ready to whip them out and Do not waste any time on the jet way, which can be very cold or hot depending on the weather.

If you are disembarking on to a jet way, Do not feel obligated to pull out coats or take off sweaters in the heat. Just walk as quickly as possible into the climate-controlled terminal. By contrast, if you have to go down air stairs on to the tarmac, try to dress your children accordingly before leaving your seats.

After arrival at the gate, You will know the door of the airplane is open when a new voice welcomes you to the airport again. Try to keep your kids from making too much noise at that moment because if there are any special announcements, either personal or about connections, they will be made at that time. If you missed it, or think you did, do not ask a crew member. Get off the plane and talk to one of the ground agents directly. An F/A could have misheard or missed it too while busy elsewhere. Look for the person with the piece of paper and/or the walkie talkie. Sometimes they have the same uniform as the crew but often it's slightly different.

If arriving in the States, all fresh food products have to be left behind. Just leave them in the seat. Do not waste time finding a trash basket. It will not be long on the seat, the cleaners will be right behind you and the trash bins are often full anyway. Even if you are leaving something a little more nasty (children often vomit on landing or maybe there was a scary diaper). It's actually better in plain view so they can dispose of it quickly. Everyone either wants to get on or off the plane at the end so do not delay the "exchange" with anything you need to do!

If you have requested any help or gate checked a stroller, ask which door you should exit. On the bigger aircraft, two doors are routinely used and passengers are herded out of either. Do not just head out the closest one. Tell a Flight Attendant before you leave that you have a stroller waiting for you. If you go out the wrong door, you may find that you have to walk all the way around again.

42. Exiting the Airport

Once off the airplane, if it's international, head to immigration control as soon as possible. This can be grim with children but the people behind the booths are known to be cooperative. I was once put in the front of the line with a screaming child. If your family has different statuses, such as you are a citizen but your spouse is a visitor, ask but usually you can stay together. Have your documents ready and be polite.

For arrival in the U.S., sometimes after Customs and Immigration you can still be singled out for the dreaded agricultural check, even if you have nothing of interest for them. This is really not convenient with children but I have never been able to talk my way out of it. No one helps me, I am alone with my children and they still had the nerve to complain about the way I put my bags on the belt. I asked them why they were singling out a solo mother with three small children to no avail. I asked them if I could take my children to my parents outside Customs so that I could complete this task more easily, to no avail. The complaint letter I wrote to the U.S. Agricultural Department was ignored.

Try to take care of any "needs" before leaving customs, or if that does not apply, while you are still in the secured area of the airport before loading yourself down with luggage. It's better to get through immigration first (again, if that applies) but use the restrooms before picking up the bags. If you have a stroller or other gear that you can't take in a normal stall, either use the handicapped cubicle or the go to the end of the row. I leave the door open and our things in sight. No one will venture in your direction if they clearly see your situation.

Now that my kids are a little older, I have a terrible time keeping them away from the luggage belts. Smaller airports are the worst. These belts are dangerous and it is important to keep children away. Have one adult collect the bags while the other stays and keeps an eye on them. If alone and you have time, stand back and collect your things towards to the end of this ritual, when there are fewer people and perhaps you can get some help. People are more likely to offer help once they've collected their own bags first. The other problem I have are toddlers standing behind me while I am hauling bags off the belt. I haven't knocked any out yet but we've had a few close calls. Keep them well away from other people doing the same. You Do not save much time grabbing the bags early since there is probably a wait again at the exit

A general tip is to mark your bag with something really obvious like putting a really bright colored ribbon on it. Too many bags get mistaken and you are even more at risk if you are trying to identify your luggage and keep your eye on your children at the same time. Again this is a hassle for anyone but even worse if you are with little ones. Give yourself a little visual cue to make life easier. Other passengers are also less likely to grab your stuff as well.

I usually end up putting the folded stroller on the luggage cart once I claim all the checked luggage. The children walk I use a carrier for the little one.

Spend as little time as possible in the airport once outside customs or security as this is, again, a public area. If you have a wait, restaurants are good places to camp out. Try to find somewhere "enclosed" as much as possible, away from the main doors.

If you are connecting, go towards your next gate, especially if you are changing terminals. You can often pass security again and stay in the "airside" area to wait. Be aware that your gate might not yet be posted or, again, the gate could change. As a general reminder, remember that some low-cost carriers do not automatically check through your bags so be prepared to repeat the entire process of checking in again from scratch. I did this alone with my three and it worked best to do it as soon as possible. Once you are "free" from the first flight, head to the counters again as soon as you can reasonably do so. Spend any extra time relaxing "air side".

If someone is picking you up, better to come up with a rendezvous point in the arrivals area than to try to find them in the crowds who tend to form at the exit. As I suggested earlier, you've asked your "party" to park the car and meet you in person rather than on the curb. You need to keep your eyes on your little one and can't scan the crowd properly. Do not even try. You could block other people trying to get out and those carts aren't that safe piled with luggage. Your greeters will probably spot you first. Get past the throng and move into a more open area where you can do your hellos in a more calm setting. If they are late, and you can contact them on a cell phone, tell them where you are and stay there.

When things didn't go as well as they should have...

If it didn't go well, and you believe it was the airline's fault, let them know. If it was a specific person, try to get their name. If you didn't manage to take note of it, give the exact time and place with a basic description. Yes, they do go back and check the rosters. I was once tracked down with only the flight number and described as "the blond with the braid". The letter didn't hold water so I was off the hook but it was followed through. You can't complain if you are breaking the rules and an employee lets you know this, unless they were rude. In that case, the complaint should center on the employee's conduct, not the rule at issue. You may want to first find out what rules apply in the incident so that you can better explain the problem. "Mistreatment" and applying any regulations are two separate issues and should get separate mentions if both occurred.

One complaint letter is very unlikely to get anyone fired but perhaps someone needs to have a word with the employee in question or a policy needs to be changed. Perhaps both but point that out, if it's the case, and suggest alternatives if you have any. If the complaint involved another company, i.e. security, over which the airline didn't have control, the airline should at least let you know this and

better, who to contact. Be aware that security and agriculture complaints usually fall on deaf ears since they aren't "customer-driven".

Be clear and to the point. By all means, let them know that you were upset and how it affected your trip but keep that part brief. Get to the meaty facts about the incident so that they can get to the heart of the problem. Avoid quoting someone unless you are absolutely certain of the exact words they used. Your letter will lose credibility with even slightly altered wording so avoid using those quotation marks if at all uncertain of exactly what was said.

Try to direct your letter to the correct authority. Do not direct complaints about the Agricultural check, for example, to your airline. Remember too the airline and airport security are usually different companies. It would be better to complain to them directly. The airline is more likely to take your complain seriously. Complaints to government agencies especially are likely to be ignored.

But, by contrast, if you had a good flight, go ahead and tell the airline that as well. They find it helpful to know what works. Airlines pay extra attention to passengers in special situations like those flying with children. If it's a specific person, please name them. It really helps confirm a good work history or counter-balance a bad one. You could also help that person to secure promotions, special assignments, etc. in the future, not to mention, making their day!