

Worried about traveling with your kids over the holidays? Read this first

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Credit: Florida International University

A little preparation can spare parents who travel with their children – and those around them – from feeling the blues this holiday season.

Among the biggest sources of discomfort for [children](#) is a change in their schedule. If a meal is served too late, or if a child is up past their bed time, it can spell trouble, according to Daniel Bagner, director of the Early Childhood Behavior Lab and a professor in Florida International University's Center for Children and Families.

Good communication can go a long way in prepping children for what's to come. It can also help a child learn what's expected of them.

"Giving a child a schedule can help," Bagner said. "Parents also should communicate to their children what behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate. They should come up with a rewards system that works."

Rewards don't have to involve buying a new toy or [junk food](#), Bagner cautions. Children could have the option of picking the first activity of the trip or selecting a TV show to watch or a game to play.

For those who fly, having food handy and finding ways to help children sleep if delays encroach upon nap or sleep times will be important, Bagner said. With [winter storms](#) known to cause severe delays or even flight cancellations, [parents](#) don't want to be caught unprepared. He suggests charging tablets and [laptop computers](#), and packing earphones, books and toys to keep children entertained.

If delays extend the amount of time stuck on a plane or at an airport, Bagner suggests parents provide their children with [positive feedback](#) – especially if they're being good.

"That's how kids learn," he said. "They learn by feedback. Parents really need to be specific about the behaviors they want to encourage. They should say 'I like the way you're sitting so nicely,' or 'Great job playing gently with your toy' or 'Thank you for speaking softly.'"

If a child's challenging behavior is a source of concern for parents, places like [FIU's Center for Children and Families](#) help find families find ways of better managing that [behavior](#). Having a child who acts out isn't a reason to avoid holiday travel, Bagner said.

Bagner is a board certified clinical child psychologist who studies interventions for at-risk infants and young children and their families.

Provided by Florida International University

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