Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

This article is meant to provide some basic ideas that may help your child while traveling. However, this should not be in lieu of an Occupational Therapy evaluation and/or treatment. Your child’s Occupational Therapist may be able to provide more detailed and customized ideas to help your traveling be successful and stress-free.

A Note about Deep Pressure Touch Stimulation (DPTS): Some ideas in here (e.g. weighted blanket or neck rests, chewing gum, etc.) are given using the concept of deep pressure helping to organize and integrate the sensory system.

DPTS is the use of deep pressure input that some research reports may help to calm and focus children by facilitating the integration and organization of their senses.

There are sense receptors in our body that at times have a difficult time communicating different senses and motor actions to our brain. Sometimes children will react in negative ways due to this decreased communication; therefore, you may see things such as the child being more rough, seeking out movement and deep pressure, as well as, having difficulty calming themselves, etc. If your child has a difficult time staying calm and focusing consider trying different deep pressure activities. Monitor his or her response to the ideas listed to help to better identify what works for your child and what does not work.

**Prepare:** If you are taking a trip that involves a lot of travel prepare your child for the trip by discussing the trip with them ahead of time and what to expect. This will help them to feel secure and decrease anxiety of the unknown. You may consider showing them a fun movie or video with a plane or train in it if it is there first time.

**Checklist:** Use a checklist to pack and involve your child in the packing process. Use this as an educational time to discuss what your needs are dependent on weather, length of stay and what is needed to be prepared for how long you will be away, etc. This too will help them to feel secure, decrease anxiety and facilitate independence in your child.
**Schedule:** Children benefit from structure and planning ahead to decrease anxiety and rushing. Use a schedule (picture or written dependent on child) with extra time added to provide for anything that may come up (e.g. traffic, etc.). Teach them that unknown things will happen and that is okay and also the reason why it is best to plan in extra time. Involve them in this step it will help them with sequencing. Another way you can work on sequencing is by looking in magazines and finding items to fill in first, next, then, and last (see example “Our Vacation” graphic organizer).

**Seating:** If your child has gravitational insecurity or doesn’t do well in small areas place him or her on the aisle side. Some planes have a row in the front that has 2 seats only. Depending on your situation, consider first class for larger seats. If your child gets motion sick in an automobile, seat child in the center rather than on the sides. Some children get motion sickness more easily when they are hungry. Provide your child a mild snack (e.g. pretzels) prior to riding in a car, plane, or train.

**Suit-case/book-bag:** Consider a book-bag or a small suit-case that can be pushed as a carryon rather than a messenger bag or purse. A book-bag applies a more even pressure to the child’s back as a form of deep pressure.

- Blanket or favorite animal inside (if child has a scent that calms them consider spraying it on their blanket or animal). Squishy animals help provide deep pressure if a child squeezes it.

- Weighted neck rest (can be found on internet) to provide deep pressure

**Snack:** Always pack snacks. Keep a snack in your car that is safe for the drive and keeps well. Dependent on the types of food you use, this too provides deep pressure input to the jaw. Try to use a combination of textures (e.g. chewy and crunchy) such as trail mix. This can be homemade with safe items your child likes (e.g. cheerios and dried fruit, etc.).

- iPod or head-set on the plane with calming music: This may muffle noise from plane that may provide stimulation to the ear causing anxiety and frustration.

Developed by Kim Bandi, OTR/L January 2013
Sunglasses to decrease sensitivity to the brightness

Fidget attached to the outside of the bag (e.g. squishy stuffed animal key chain). This may provide a quick deep pressure and touch stimulus for their hands and help them keep their hands to themselves.

Gum to provide deep pressure input, decrease ear popping if on the plane, and it may also help with motion sickness (possibly mint for motion sickness)

**Traveling and Your Senses:**

**Visual:** All of the items below may help to prevent the irritation that bright lights may cause sensitive eyes and/or to help a child to feel more focused and organized.

- Sunglasses
- Transparent shades on the windows
- Color overlay on windows
- Gel cling-on if safe for driver’s view

Clutter may be overstimulated to anyone, including children. Therefore, organizing items in carry-on and/or suitcase will help your child to feel less stimulated and be able to focus more. Consider packing an entire outfit (e.g. place pants folded in half long ways down, shirt folded in half on top, socks, and then undergarments) and roll it up tightly starting at the bottom and working up. Continue this sequence until you have all the outfits you will need. Place liquids and other small items in zip-lock bags so they are organized together and easy to find.

**Movement:** The items below may help your child to sit still by providing deep pressure or a form of movement that they may be seeking.

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Prior to getting in a train, car, or plane have your child participate in movement activities. If you are at home, have your child play a game for 15-20 minutes (e.g. Wii dance, ball toss, basketball, etc.). Next have them do a deep pressure activity such as wall push-ups, chair or regular push-ups, crab walking, etc. This may help them to get the need to move out of their body and then help to calm them down prior to traveling.

Move-n-sit cushion or a cushion that they are comfortable in (this may help provide the feeling of movement and decrease the need to get up and move around)

![Image of Move-n-sit cushion]

Weighted neck rest (deep pressure)

Consider having your child wear heavier shoes (deep pressure)

Have your child push his or her suit-case rather than pull it (deep pressure into the joints to help the child know where his or her body is in space and help organize his or her sensory system).

Shoulder compressions: firmly press down through your child’s shoulders 10 times.

Massage your child’s back if they start to get fidgety. Applying a firm deep pressure, always keeping one hand on to prevent the stimulation that on and off touch may provide.

Teach your child to give himself a big hug (deep pressure).

Gum (deep pressure)
**Oral:** This section combines the idea of deep pressure with making your life easier by your child being comfortable.

**Snack:** Always travel with a snack! Keep items that don’t melt in your purse, carry-on, and/or car. Sometimes children are just plain hungry. This is also a good idea for those children who are frequently chewing on non-edible items. Try to use a combination of textures (e.g. chewy and crunchy) such as trail mix to help to calm and organize their sensory system.

**Drink:** Bring a drink that does not go bad, such as water. Take a straw to put in a cup so that a child has to suck out of it. This movement is considered to have a calming influence.

**Gum (deep pressure)**

**Tactile:**

**Fidget bag:** Place a small bag in the suit-case or book bag with some of your child’s favorite toys to fidget with (e.g. Legos, cards, etc.). This may provide a quick deep pressure and touch stimulus for their hands and help them keep their hands to themselves.

Have Velcro, puffy glue, or various textures on the outside of the carry-on suitcase/book-bag. The book-bag may be used in lieu of a lap-pad (a weighted lap-sized pad that provides deep pressure to legs to help them to sit and focus). Place the book-bag on the child’s legs and allow them to play with the fidget items on top or inside of it.

**Auditory:** These ideas may help to decrease external sound stimuli that may cause irritation and frustration.

**IPod or head-set on the plane with calming music:** to muffle noise from plane that may frustrate and irritate your child.
EarPlanes: This may help decrease ear-popping and will also muffle sound.

**Travel Games:** The ideas below may help to keep your child occupied while traveling and help decrease their stress and anxiety, as well as, yours. Keep in mind if your child gets motion sick you will need to monitor what he or she is able to do without getting sick. Often reading and writing in a car will increase symptoms of motion sickness.

Travel Bingo

Travel “I Spy”

Work on spelling words

Take math flashcards

Have your child keep track of how many license plates you pass with different states (e.g. 10 from PA, 1 from MD, etc.)

Make a story about trip (allow child to take pictures or draws pictures about the trip)

Small travel kit games

Name that song
## Our Vacation

Either draw a picture or write a sentence in each box to sequence your entire trip or parts of your trip or preparation.

Name: ________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First</th>
<th>Next</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then</th>
<th>Last</th>
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</table>
Our Vacation Example

Either draw a picture or write a sentence in each box to sequence your entire trip or parts of your trip or preparation.

Name: __________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Pack</th>
<th>Next drive to airport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image of a girl packing" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image of a road with trees" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then check in</th>
<th>Last fly to Disney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image of a family checking in" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image of children on a plane" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developed by Kim Bandi, OTR/L January 2013
I Spy Pictures  (Print pictures your child may see on his or her trip, hole punch and use a ring clip to keep them together)

A Bird       A Creek

A Bus       A Butterfly

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A Cat

A Boat
A Flower

A Field

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The Ocean

A Lake
Snowmen

A Truck

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A Bike

An Orchard

Developed by Kim Bandi, OTR/L January 2013
A Pumpkin Patch

A Stop Sign

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### Travel Bingo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mailbox</th>
<th>Stop Sign</th>
<th>Bike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Truck</td>
<td>Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed Limit</td>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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