

## **On the Road Again**

### **Keeping Kids Entertained in the Car**

Of course travel has been made much easier with the host of games and movies that can be carried with us these days on our tablets and electronic devices; however if you want to connect with your children a bit more while traveling, try some of these ideas.

#### **Alphabet Game**

Play the alphabet game using billboards to search out the alphabet from A-Z. Play cooperatively as a family or make it a competition. Add a twist by deciding on a six to ten letter word. Look for the letters in order on billboards and signs. Write the word in which you found each letter.

#### **Sing-Along Songs**

Teach your child a sing-along song from your childhood.

- The Other Day, I Met a Bear
- Boom Chica Boom
- Baby Shark
- The Green Grass Grew All Around
- Down by the Bay
- Hokey Pokey
- Father Abraham

#### **Travel Scavenger Hunt**

Research your destination and make a scavenger hunt game based on your destination. Look for landmarks, history, points of interest, characters of interest or interesting trivia.

#### **Pen and Paper Games**

Based on your child's age, teach your child to play pen and paper games such as Sudoku, hangman, tic-tac-toe, dot and box and stop gate. Check out some more unique pencil and paper games at <http://www.papg.com/>.

#### **Mandala Drawings**

Teach your child to make mandala drawings. Make corporative mandalas by giving each person a different color marker and a piece of paper. Start a design and then swap papers. Each person takes turns adding design elements to each mandala.

**I Spy.** "I spy with my little eye, something red." This easy-to-learn game is perfect for preschoolers, and can keep them entertained for unbelievably long periods of time. The directions are simple: One person spies something and recites the line, ending in a clue. Everyone else takes turns trying to guess the mystery item.

**Road Trip Bingo.** This fun game combines bingo with a scavenger hunt. Give each child a flat surface, such as a clipboard or hardcover book, to put on his or her lap. Each player gets a [free printable bingo card](#) and a zip-lock bag with 16 pennies. When a player spies an item on his card,

he covers the picture with a penny. Just like in regular bingo, the first player to cover all the squares in a straight line wins.

**The Preacher's Cat.** Here's another alphabet-based memory game for school-age kids. The game centers around a sentence in which only two words change. To play, each player constructs the same sentence around a letter of the alphabet. Starting with A, the first player might say "The preacher's cat is an awesome cat named Amy." The second player replaces the two underlined words with others starting with A, such as, "The preacher's cat is an adorable cat named Albert." If a player can't think of a new word, or if she repeats a word, she is out. The play continues with B, C, D, and so on, until there is one remaining player.

**Spot the Car.** For families with 'tween and teen car hounds, this scavenger hunt is a fun alternate to the license plate game. Instead of looking for different states, you're looking for different car models. Use our [printable game sheet](#) to hold a family car scavenger hunt.

**I'm Going on a Picnic.** This alphabet-based memory game is great for kids 5 and up. You don't need a game board or any materials. The game can be played with as few as two players, but it's more fun when the whole family joins in. The first player says "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing..." followed by something that begins with A, such as apples. The second player repeats what the first person said, but adds something that begins with B. So she might say "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing apples and bananas." And so on with C, D, and the rest of the alphabet. If someone forgets an item, she is out. To be fair, feel free to be lenient and give hints to younger players. The last player to be able to recite all the items on the list wins.

**20 Questions.** This easy-peasy game is great for younger kids, thanks to its straightforward rules. Player One thinks of a person, place or thing. Everyone else takes turns asking questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no. After each answer, the questioner gets one guess. Play continues until a player guesses correctly.

**License Plate Game.** When we were kids, everyone seemed to play the license plate game on family road trips. Armed with a pad of paper, we would write down the name of each state as we spotted it. The goal, of course, was to nab all 50 states. If we were lucky, we'd bag the Canadian provinces, too. Nowadays we love the ease of an updated [free printable license plate game](#), where kids cross off the US states and Canadian provinces as they spy them. For older kids learning US geography, we recommend the map version, which shows how far away each car originated.

### **Secret Place Race**

*Ages 7 and up:* One person looks at a road map and finds a small town, village, river, etc. That person announces the name of the place she has chosen. A second player has 60 seconds to look at the map and try to find the secret place.

### **Restaurant Race**

*Ages 5 and up:* Each player chooses a restaurant, such as Burger King, Taco Bell, McDonalds, etc. Players earn points by spotting their restaurant off the road, on a billboard, on exit markers, on Food/Fuel signs, or by hearing it mentioned on the radio. Impose a time limit -- say, 20 minutes - and then add up the points.

### **The Theme Song Game**

*Ages 5 and up:* One person hums the tune to a favorite TV show, and everyone else tries to name the show as fast as possible. The first person to guess correctly hums the next song.

### **The Animal Name Game**

*Ages 6 and up:* One person names an animal. Then each person in order has to name another animal (no repeating!) that starts with the last letter of the previous animal named. There are no winners or losers in this game. With older children, try the game with TV shows, or geographical categories such as cities or countries.

### **Eating an Alphabet**

Let your half-starved brood describe how hungry they are in this game, best played about half an hour before you make a pit stop for food. This version of the "I'm Packing for a Picnic" game begins when you announce "I'm so hungry I could eat an aviator" ("alligator," or "apple"). The next player adds on with a B word. She might say, "I'm so hungry I could eat an aviator and a bunny rabbit" ("belly button," or "bologna slice"). See if you can keep it up until your family is eating zoos, zippers, or zigzags.

### **Billboard Poetry**

Take turns picking out four words from road signs. Give the words to the other players who have 1 minute to turn the words into a four-line, rhyming poem using one word per line.

### **One Minute of Words**

Everybody gets a pencil and paper. Someone has to be the timekeeper (a good job for a grown-up). The timekeeper picks a letter, tells it to everyone else, and shouts "Go!" Players write as many words as possible that start with that letter. When a minute is up, the timekeeper says "Stop!" and all the players put down their pencils. Whoever has the most legitimate words wins. Decide in advance whether you can finish writing a word you've already started when the game ends. Now, give yourself one more minute to write a sentence with as many of the words as you can.

### **Word Stretch**

Give your child a word challenge by asking her to make as many words as she can from the letters in a phrase such as "Are we there yet?" or "When will we be at the zoo?"

### **Race to 20**

Two players take turns counting to twenty. On each turn, a player can say one or two numbers. (If the first says "One," the second might say "Two, three.") Try to force your opponent to reach twenty first.

### **Buzz**

This is a team effort to try to reach 100 without making a mistake. Take turns counting, beginning with one. Every time you get to a number that's divisible by seven (7, 14, 21, . . .) or has a seven in it (17), say "Buzz" instead of the number. If one person forgets to say "Buzz," everyone has to start over. If this is too hard, say "Buzz" for every number divisible by 5. If you want a real challenge, try Fuzz Buzz. Say "Fuzz" for every number with a three in it or that's divisible by three, and "Buzz" for every number with a seven in it or that's divisible by seven.

### **Guess Mobile**

Name a guess master -- the person who poses a guessing challenge. He or she could ask passengers to guess the color of the next passing car, or how long before you get to the next town. Or, with three clues, what it is that someone else sees.

### **The House on the Hill**

Invent stories about people in the houses you are driving by. What do you think they do for work? What's their favorite food? Where do they go on vacation? Get into lots of details, such as whether they snore loudly or are afraid of spiders. Give them names, hobbies, pets, and so on.

### **Guess My Name**

In this acting game players imitate the motions, habits, and expressions of a famous person, such as an athlete, politician, musician, or actor. The clincher: No talking allowed! Players can ask Yes or No questions (which are met by a nod or a shake). The correct guesser does the next impression.

### **Two Truths and One Lie**

The first person makes three statements about himself or herself. Two are true; the other is a lie. For example, you could say, "I had a dog named Puddles. My sister cut off my hair once when I was asleep. I won the school spelling bee when I was in third grade." Everybody then holds up one, two, or three fingers to show which statement they think is the lie. Reveal the answer and let the next person fib away.

### **Pit Stops**

Six top games to beat the fidgets: leapfrog, four square, spud, tag, Frisbee, wheelbarrow races.

### **My Sweet**

Here's an easy activity while you wait for restaurant food to arrive. Grab the sugar packets on the table and try these sweet games: Arrange 12, 16, 20, or 24 packets on the table in straight lines of four. Now have two players take turns removing one, two, or three packets at a time. The player who picks up the last packet loses. Or, hide an even number of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters under the packets and take turns trying to find matching pairs.

### **Crazy Menu**

On a paper restaurant menu, take turns crossing out key words. Then have your kids read aloud the new and often grotesque combinations they've created. Anyone for Pepperoni Cake with Strawberry Lettuce?

### **Car Scavenger Hunt**

Hand your kids a pack of index cards and ask them to write or draw pictures of 50 things they might see on a trip. Keep the cards for scavenger hunts when players vie to match what they see with the cards.

### **Thumb Wrestling**

When you crave an active car game, pack up the books and puzzles and thumb wrestle. Two players sitting next to each other hook the four fingers of their right hands together so both of their right thumbs are sticking straight up. The object is to pin down your opponent's right thumb using your right thumb.

### **Color Safari**

This all-ages game is easily adaptable to your kids' attention spans and the amount of time you have to play. All you do is agree on a basic color — such as red, blue, green, or yellow — and challenge your kids to 100 items that are this color. Younger kids can play a shortened version — counting items to 10 or even 25; older kids will be challenged if you set a time limit and make them race against one another. You can also give each player a different color to search for.

### **Geography**

Start with A to Z anyplace in the world: Kansas, say. The next person has to think of a place that begins with the last letter of Kansas, such as South Africa. Whoever goes next needs a place that starts with A. It has to be a real place — and no using a map!

### **Secret Highway Messages**

Pass out the pencils and paper, and keep your eyes peeled for official road signs. Each time you spot one, write down the first letter. When you've passed five to seven signs — and have five to seven letters — you're ready to crack the code. Here's how: each letter stands for a word. So the letters D, S, C, S, and A could stand for the secret message "Drive slowly, construction starts ahead." Of course, others in your family may interpret it as "Dad, stop, candy store ahead."

### **Raindrop Race**

On a rainy day, each player traces the course of a raindrop down the car window. The first drop to reach the bottom wins.

### **Squabble Solutions**

Give your kids 25 cents in pennies at the start of the trip. Each time they fight or whine, charge them a penny. Offer a reward, such as doubling or tripling their money, if they haven't lost a cent during the ride.

### **Wager and Win**

Kids are natural wagers — they love to bet how much, how long, how far, how many. If you're in a bind for a moment's entertainment, ask them to guess the number of French fries on your plate or to estimate how many steps it will take to walk to your airport gate. The key here is to be able to verify the guesses — you'll need to wear a watch with a second hand and carry a calculator.

### **Creative Competition**

Kids love challenges. Need to get rid of the trash in the car? See who can smash the trash into the smallest paper ball, then toss it in the wastepaper bag. Want quiet time? Hold a five-minute silence contest. Need to get through errands in a hurry? Challenge your kids to a race against time. You may feel that your motives are transparent, but your kids won't care.

Fortunately-Unfortunately

### **The Grocery Game**

A good way to keep everyone in the car entertained and engaged is to play a memory game such as The Grocery Game. To begin, the first player names an object available at a grocery store that starts with the letter A. The next player has to repeat what the first player said and then add another grocery item that starts with a B. For example, if player one says "apples," player two would repeat "apples" and then might add "bananas." If you forget a grocery item, you're out, and the game continues until the player with the best memory wins.

If groceries aren't your thing, you can play variations of this game with anything from animals to sports to people's names.

### **Spelling Bee**

Spelling bees in the car can be educational as well as fun.

A spelling bee held in your car can offer parents the best of both worlds: Your child will be having fun and learning at the same time. One at a time, each person in the car takes turns spelling a word. If they spell the word correctly, they remain in the game. If they spell the word incorrectly, they're eliminated from the competition. Keep spelling words until you determine which one of your road warriors is the champion speller.

When selecting words, especially for the younger members of your group, make sure that you choose words that are age appropriate. You don't want to leave anyone feeling frustrated, disappointed or inclined to throw a road-trip tantrum.

### **Team Storytelling**

Get the creative juices flowing among your fellow road trippers by composing a group story. One person in the car starts by creating the first line of the story. You can start with a simple "Once upon a time, there lived a princess" or come up with something more unconventional like, "Joey the frog always had blue spots." Next, each person in the car adds a line, and the story builds and builds. Depending on your group's story telling stamina, you could go on for a few minutes or a few hours.

To make the game more challenging and fun, make a rule that all of the lines rhyme or, instead of going in a circle, call on people to come up with a line. After you've reached your destination, your kids could write and illustrate the story as a token of their road trip adventure.

### **The Banana Game**

With the banana game, spotting this car earns you two points.

If you're looking for a game that doesn't require a lot of thought, try the Banana Game. Keen observation is the only skill required. The first person who spots a passing yellow vehicle gets points. You can award points based on the size or make of the car. For instance, a yellow school bus might be worth five points, and a yellow sports car might be worth two.

Another way to heighten the competition is to put a limit on the time you have to spot bananas. For example, the winner of the game could be the person who spots the most bananas in 30 minutes. Or the winner could be the player who sees the largest cumulative number of yellow vehicles during your entire road trip.

### **Find the Vehicle**

If your kids or fellow passengers are car enthusiasts, a round of Find the Vehicle is a great way to pass the time during a road trip. You can play this game in a variety of ways: You could simply have passengers call out an interesting car model. Or ask them to search for a specific type of car, and reward points to the first person who spots it. To up the competition, specify a color or state license plate in addition to a make or model. The first person to find the car gets to choose the game's next make and model.

### **Slug Bug**

Spotting a vintage bug like this one earns extra points in slug bug.

Although parents might be inclined to shy away from any game featuring slugging in the title, this classic road trip game can actually be played in more peaceful manner than its name might imply. Every time someone spots a Volkswagen (VW) Bug, have them gently tap the person next to them (rather than punching them) or announce to the car that they've spotted the vehicle.

If you award points for each VW Bug spotted, you can make the game more competitive by assigning additional points for older bugs or bugs of more unusual colors. For example, a brand new black bug might be worth five points, but a lime green bug from the 1960s might be worth 25.

### **Fortunately-Unfortunately**

While you're taking a road trip, your kids are a captive audience. Take the opportunity while you have their attention to challenge them to think positively by playing Fortunately-Unfortunately. In this game, one person will make an unfortunate statement, and then another player will counter the statement with a positive response.

Fortunately-Unfortunately presents endless possibilities for creativity and positive thinking. For example, one player could make the statement, "Unfortunately, a lion is going to attack us." A

second player would counter with a more fortunate statement such as "Fortunately, I took lion taming lessons." The more exaggerated and silly the statements are the better!

### **Ghost**

Form a chain of letters to create a word in this thinking game for kids who like spelling. Players take turns adding letters. For example, the first player might say, "T"; the second player could say "I." Play continues with each person adding one letter to the chain. Tell the backseat gang to avoid being the person who adds the last letter and forms a word. The player who completes a word loses the round. However, players must have a word in mind as they add a letter; other players can challenge them if they think there is no word that begins with the current chain.

### **Remember what you see**

Participants pit their observation skills against one another in this memory game. Choose a direction in which the kids should stare for 30 seconds, then have them turn around and write a list of the names of everything they remember seeing in that direction, the more detailed the better. The player with the longest list wins. Strangers may wonder at the furious scribbling going on, but tell the kids to pay them no attention as they need to focus intently to win.