

## Dear Ms. Chen,

This summer our family has decided to travel to California to visit family. Since we live on the East Coast, this will be quite a long flight, especially with two boys —ages five and seven. My children have only flown once before and that was a very short flight to Florida last year. Even on the short trip to Florida, I noticed that others on the flight looked annoyed to see two little boys getting on. Even though the flight was two hours, it felt like ten. My husband and I did everything we could to keep the boys occupied. However, they are boys and were curious about everything. They talked and laughed, and yes, even whined when they got bored. Do you have any tips?

—Fearful Flyer

## Dear Fearful Flyer,

I can totally sympathize with you. Having three children of my own, my husband and I have experienced many stressful flights over the years. They want to play with the flight phone, play with the tray table, put their feet on the seat in front of them, go to the restroom, get something from their bag in the overhead bin, and . . . Well, you know what I'm talking about. It is stressful and does make for a very long flight, especially if you are concerned about the comfort of your fellow passengers.

Now that my children are old enough to fly without too much concern for their behavior, I can also sympathize with the “non-child” traveler, especially after having the back of my seat kicked over and over again for four hours straight. I have found that not all parents are concerned with their child's behavior. Some parents actually believe that all 250 passengers aboard their flight find enjoyment from watching and hearing their little Billy running up and down the aisle while loudly singing, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”

Patience, patience, patience. This is the key to air travel. We all need to realize that airplanes are public transportation. Those traveling without children should realize the difficulty of traveling with children. They should also realize that glaring at parents who are obviously trying to control their children will only add stress. I felt a sense of relief when another passenger offers to get my child's bag from the overhead bin, pick up a fallen toy, or even smile at my child.



# Airplane Etiquette

By Christine Chen

Parents traveling with children can take some steps to make the experience a little more enjoyable for their children, themselves and others. Here are just a few things you can do to prepare yourself and your child for air travel:

- **MAGIC WORDS.** It is amazing the power words like “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me,” have. When your child uses these words when traveling, other passengers will notice and are more likely to overlook other “would-be” annoyances.
- **BE PREPARED.** Purchase small items just for the flight such as special activity books, new pencils or crayons, small puzzles and games, and snacks. It will keep them busy for hours.
- **REST ROOMS.** Even if my children said they did not need to use the rest room before boarding the plane, I always encouraged them to go anyway. Of course there are always emergencies while on the plane and this is the time to use those magic words.
- **POPPING EARS.** You can almost count on several crying children during take-off and landing. Since your children are old enough to understand, explain that during take-off and landing their ears might hurt and this is the time to chew gum or eat a piece of candy. For infants, it is a good idea to have a bottle ready.
- **SEAT ETIQUETTE.** Before the flight, explain to your children that the space on the plane is very cramped and there are many other

people who will be on the plane as well. Remind them that they must stay in their seat, with the seat belt buckled, as much as possible. Explain that if they put their feet on the seat in front of them, it will be uncomfortable for the person in that seat. It is also always best for you to sit between your child and the other passenger in your row. There is one button on the arm rest that children love to play with—the button that reclines the seat. Children should be aware of the affect this has on the passenger behind them. Ask that your child not play with this button at all.

- **SPEAKING WITH OTHER PASSENGERS.** Believe it or not, other passengers may not find your children as charming as you do. A brief conversation with other passengers is fine, but talking non-stop for hours is not. Remind your children that others on the flight might want to read, rest, or watch the movie. It is also important for children to use low voices.

When children know what to expect and understand the affect their behavior has on others, I believe they are more willing to cooperate. You can be sure your fellow passengers will notice and may even have a kind word to say about your children at the end of the flight. Have a wonderful trip! ☺

*Christine Chen is the founder and director of Modern Manners. Is there something about manners that you've been too embarrassed to ask? Contact her at [modernmanners@erols.com](mailto:modernmanners@erols.com), and she might use your question in a future column.*