

## **Preplanning keeps families in touch when parents travel**

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Travel for business or pleasure often separates parents from their children. When children know what to expect and have contact with a traveling parent, their sense of comfort and security is strengthened.

Families can have fun staying in touch by using some old ideas and new technology. These ideas don't beat being together, but they can help make adult-only travel a less lonely experience for both parents and children. Here are 10 tips to use before, during, and after a parent is away.

1. Tell your children why, when, and where the travel will occur. Use time concepts that each child can understand.
2. Clearly show on a calendar your departure and return dates.
3. Use children's books to help your youngsters prepare for and understand your departure and absence.
4. Allow your children to be part of family good-byes and greetings at airports and train or bus stations.
5. Mark your travel routes on a map and research your destination together. Searching the Internet can help children learn about a particular site.
6. Leave surprise messages for your children to find during your absence.
7. Take pictures to show or send to your children. Digital cameras allow you to transmit pictures via e-mail or to upload them to a family Web site.
8. Phone, fax, or e-mail your children regularly. Send postcards or letters; children enjoy receiving their own mail.
9. Upon return, spend individual time with each child. Also plan a family sharing time.
10. Eat a favorite meal together when you return or prepare a new recipe from the travel site together.

A child's reaction to a parent's departure may vary with the child's age and characteristics of the parent-child relationship. Having a parent away from home can be confusing and disruptive for younger children, but it may be a welcome change for teenagers.

Iowa State University Extension has a variety of family life resources available. Two related publications that focus on child development and parenting are *Living With Your Teenager, The Changing Parent-Child Relationship* (PM 944B) and *Understanding Children – Fears* (PM 1529D). In addition, Extension's "Me & My Dad" Web site, [www.extension.iastate.edu/dads](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/dads), provides ideas on how dads at a distance can stay connected to their children.

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