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Packed for Life contains affiliate links. If you make a purchase using any of these links, we may receive compensation at no extra cost to you. As an Amazon Associate, I earn from qualifying purchases. See my Disclosure policy for more info. Road tripping with kids? The thought of entertaining toddlers and preschoolers on long car rides can have even the most laid back of parents reconsidering their trip. Which is why I've gathered our tried and true easy and fun road trip activities for toddlers and preschoolers. After years of taking road trips for summer holidays, to visit family and to move across the country I have some pretty cool tips, tricks and ideas to make your next road trip more fun, and less stressful for everyone. Practice and preparation are key. The more you do it, the more you can't sit still in one place for even 2 minutes toddler or preschooler will know what to expect, and the easier it will become. In our experience, the best kids car activities are easy, mess free and something they can do on their own. Here are what we think are the best road trip activities for 2-year-olds, 3-year-olds, and preschoolers 3-5 years old that you can buy, make or do yourself. Plus some road trip tips to make your family's journey smoother. FUN TODDLER ROAD TRIP ACTIVITIES Miss S enjoying drawing on our cross country road trip | Photo: Packed for Life Don't forget to grab our Road Trip planner so you can stop stressing about trip planning & logistics, and keep everything organized and in one place. Other tips: Use a surface to play / color on: You can use a small shallow box, a small metal baking tray or a car seat activity tray like this one. But don't stress if you don't have one. We've done many family road trips without an activity tray. Plan ahead: The trick I've found is to plan ahead and have a variety of activities you (and they) can pick and choose from. Small, easy age appropriate activities: Toddlers and preschoolers don't always have long attention spans, so we've found that lots of smaller activities can really save the day. You know your kids best. Choose one's you think they'd like. If you have babies in the family too, these are some of the best travel toys for babies to keep them happy & entertained. Coloring activities were always a favorite for our kids. To manage the likelihood of said toddlers throwing crayons around, keep only a few in a small container they can easily open. If you are short on time (who isn't?), then mini coloring kits like these were always a hit when our youngest was little. Or you can make your own. Grab a small empty first aid kit from the Dollar Store or local box store like Target or Walmart. Hot glue gun a square post-it pad on the inside (top) in a couple of crayons, or pencil crayons. Whatever fits. Learn how here. We've loved these WOW! books for years. Super handy to keep the kids entertained on long or short car rides, at restaurants, or even much needed quiet time at home. No mess! Your littles will just paint with the water brush and color appears. Melissa and Doug have lots of great products for toddlers and preschoolers. Your kiddies will be spending lots of time looking out the window. Why not get them to do a scavenger hunt. My youngest always loves doing this, even now that she's much older. Or if they are a little older, this Road Trip Bingo game would be a fun car activity. PRO TIP: What always worked well for us is to have a travel backpack for each kid. Inside they can keep all their toys, books, road trip activities & some snacks all in one place. Check out our list of the best travel backpacks for kids and toddlers. Anything magnetic will help reduce tears from having their pieces fall on the floor every 5 seconds where you can't reach. Just make sure there are no small magnets or pieces for them to swallow. Magnetic puzzles or Magnetic dress up kits will keep them busy and entertained for a good long while. If you have the time, there are a lot of super cute, and fun DIY busy books you can make out there. But if you aren't so crafty, or are short on time, this Montessori busy board is ready for your toddlers to have fun in the car. While they also learn key motor skills to help them dress themselves. A no mess road trip activity for toddlers & kids. The Magnetic Drawing Board can be a great sensory toy, and a relaxing screen free activity for the car. Put on some road trip music, and the kids will have focused fun for a long time. Best gift ever. A Boogie board is an LCD writing tablet that comes with a special pen (stylus) you can draw on and erase over and over again. You may want to consider grabbing an extra stylus or two, given these tend to get lost or thrown on the floor of the car. Yes, I am speaking from experience. Miss S enjoying some sticker time in the car | Photo: Packed for Life Love life stickers. A reusable sticker book is even better as they can move their stickers around more than once. Plus you don't have to worry about peeling stickers off car windows, your seats or somebody's hair. Guess how I know?!! Melissa and Doug make great ones. Including these super cute make-a-face sticker books. When little Miss S was younger we tried to avoid much screen time if we could. However sometimes you need a little something to distract them when they get antsy. The iPad or a tablet does make an easy kids car activity. You can load up some episodes of their favorite tv show, or a toddler / preschooler friendly movie or tv. It's good to have as a back up, just in case. Give yourself some grace, and a break. Traveling in confined space for 13 hours with young kids is exhausting. Grab a subscription to the Family Amazon Prime or Disney Plus for the month. With Prime you get music and movie / tv streaming. Some toddler & preschooler friendly apps we loved, or that come highly recommended: ABC Mouse LEGO Duplo Trains Toca Monster or Toca Nature Very Hungry Caterpillar Daniel Tiger Busy Shapes Moose Math Khan Academy Kids Epic - Reading App Podcasts are a great way to keep young children focused and happy. Now that my daughter is a little older, she still likes listening to them while she draws, cleans her room or for those long travel days by lane or car. Some of our favourites include: Wow in the World Story Pirates Brains On! What If World Ear Snacks I almost said books on tape....Showing my age there. Listening to audiobooks is another great way to skip the screens on long car rides and family road trips. And avoid the hoarse raspy voice from having to read Peppa Goats to Ballet Class for the 7 gazillionth time. Ask me how I know! Grab an Try Audible Plus if you want to listen to adult books too. Or the Epic reading app just for the kids. You may also like the Best Walkie Talkies for Road Trips Think epic 80's tape mix, but for the 2020's and the younger crowd. My partner is the DJ in our family. He has an eclectic taste in music; everything from German metal bands to classical music, country, ska and pop. You don't have to be stuck to just kids music from Sesame Street (unless you want to be). Keep their road trip activities handy in a small bag, bucket or backpack | Photo: Packed for Life Sometimes the simplest things are the easiest, and cost the least. Pull out some of those old school games you used to play on road trips when you were a kid. See if you can spot license plates from all the States (if in the US), or provinces / Territories (if in Canada. Whoever stops first gets the point the one with the most points wins at the end. Or skip the points. Invent a story as a family. Each person takes a turn telling part of the story with a sentence or two. Create your own fairytale...start with once upon a time. You can make a time limit for the story, say 10 minutes, or after each family member has had a chance to say 3-5 sentences. If ever there was a game that evokes summer vacations and riding in the back seat of my childhood car, squished between my brothers to keep them from fighting, it's I Spy. One person chooses an object, and the rest of the players have to guess what it is. Road trips are a great time to ask your kids about the world and their thoughts. You never know how they will respond, but there is guaranteed smiles and laughter. Especially if you start a round of would you rather.....Would you rather have to drink everything from your nose or eat everything with your belly button.... Check out our list of road trip questions to ask. When I had more time (and energy), I made all sorts of DIY travel activities for my youngest when she was a toddler and preschooler. Pinterest has lots of great low cost DIY ideas, if you are looking for screen free, fun car activities. I used to put these in their own individual soft pencil case to keep them organized. If you grab the ones with holes, you can make a travel binder to keep your kids road trip activities all in one spot. Grab a pack of popsicle sticks (multi colored for more visual interest), and stick-on those velcro circles from a craft store or the dollar store. Stick the velcro circles on each end of the popsicle sticks. Your toddler can then make different shapes with them. Little Miss S loved this one the best out of all the DIY road trip activities I made. Continuing along the popsicle theme, create sight word popsicle sticks. You will need: Metal tin or lunch box or small cookie sheet in a pinch Popsicle sticks Roll of magnetic tape Sharpie Sheet of pictures with simple words underneath they can make (optional). Attach pieces of magnetic tape to the popsicle. Write letters with a sharpie on each popsicle stick. Have your kids try to make words out of the letters. Or alternately, you can use a First Words magnetic poetry kit, or magnetic letters. Just make sure they're old enough not to swallow anything. Make use of all that lego that is sitting in your car! You can grab most lego crafting items at great prices at Target or local box stores. What you'll need for lego boxes: Small square plastic lunch box with lid Small square thin lego board Glue gun (a small one is fine) A couple of crayons, or pencil crayons. Whatever fits. Learn how here. We've loved these WOW! books for years. Super handy to keep the kids entertained on long or short car rides, at restaurants, or even much needed quiet time at home. No mess! Your littles will just paint with the water brush and color appears. Melissa and Doug have lots of great products for toddlers and preschoolers. Your kiddies will be spending lots of time looking out the window. 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Or alternately, you can use a First Words magnetic poetry kit, or magnetic letters. Just make sure they're old enough not to swallow anything. Make use of all that lego that is underfoot and driving you crazy. You can grab most of the crafting items cheaply at the dollar store. What you'll need for mini lego boxes: Small square plastic lunch container with lid Small square thin lego board Glue gun Handful of lego pieces Glue the base lego board to the lid, put a handful of lego pieces in the plastic container once dry, and there you go. Cheap and easy in car entertainment for kids. Or if for some reason you don't have lego (tell me your secret!) grab this travel lego building case Unrolling and then rolling back up spools of ribbon can be a fun toddler car activity that can be used again and again. You may just have to be the one that rolls it back up though. Get those fine motor skills working. Pom Pom tweezer activities can be fun. What you will need: Big and small pom poms 3-4 small plastic cups (take out sauce sizes) Kid friendly tweezers Get your kids to sort by color, or number of pom poms into the empty plastic cups. Give your kids some cheerios or fruit loops and a pipe cleaner and have them make cheerio bracelets. Bonus, they can have a snack when they get hungry. But we forewarned - it can be messy. If you are driving at night, kids will get a kick out of playing with glow sticks. Bring out the jokes! Whether you are naturally funny....come on, parent jokes are the best, or need a little help, everyone will be smiling. Here's a great option for kids 3 to 6. PREPARING FOR YOUR FAMILY ROAD TRIP Find fun playground stops to run their energy off on long family car trips | Photo: Packed for Life Taking long car rides with kids can be challenging and exhausting. Here are a few of my family's tips that I use to make our road trips easier: Age appropriate road trip entertainment - Make sure your road trip activities are age appropriate and suit your child. Bring a variety of kids road trip activities you can switch out regularly Begin your day with some quick & easy road trip breakfast ideas Start your day early - There's usually a sweet spot where kids are still happy in the mornings. Start earlier, and they may even nap for a bit in the car. Make frequent stops to let the kids run around and use the washroom. Prioritize some fun kid friendly stops along the way your children will enjoy. A trip to the zoo, a cool playground, a short hike or a stop for ice cream. Drive less each day if you can. Load up on kid friendly road trip meals & snacks - hungry kids are no fun! Prepare for the unexpected. Bring a first aid kit, a clean up kit (wet wipes, hand sanitizer, extra clothes, small garbage bucket), and a container in case a kid gets sick. Bring a couple of large towels - Clean up unexpected diaper explosions, or use as picnic blankets, rolled up as a pillow and even shade for a back window. You really can have fun family road trips with young kids. We've made so many fun memories on road trips with our littles. They often bring up special or funny moments we've had long after the road trip is finished. But if you're planning a long drive with a toddler or preschooler, make sure you plan some great road trip activities to keep them entertained. You'll be glad you did.