

# In the Car

**Connect:** Rather than finding toys to amuse and distract your child, use driving time to connect and enjoy being together.

*As a parent (and as a teacher) I would think of yourself as the child's greatest play thing. Your voice, your face, the things you do, and your actions are the things that intrigue them most. They have a natural curiosity for the things humans do. The thing to remember is that you and your time are the most valuable things to a child.*

– Patricia K. Kuhl, PhD, Professor of Speech and Hearing Sciences, University of Washington; Co-Director, Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences, University of Washington

**Watch and listen:** What interests your child on car trips? Is it looking for signs that you are almost home or it is talking while you are together? Is it repeating new or silly words or sounds? Is it saying nursery rhymes, singing or watching for when the traffic lights change?

## **Extend:**

For your baby

- Use car travel as a time to sing. Play a tape or CD or sing songs you know or love. You can also make up songs about what you are seeing along the road or sing along with the radio. Singing about everyday activities helps children enjoy the sounds of language, and helps babies begin to associate words with good experiences. Singing also creates a sense of togetherness.

For your toddler

- If your toddler likes trucks, look for trucks as you drive along and see who can yell out “truck” first. Or listen to what your toddler says and repeat their words, adding new words or rhyming with words they say. These games help children learn to watch carefully and to categorize.

For your preschooler

- Use car time to talk about your child's day. Ask specific questions (“Did you draw in preschool?” or “Did you eat a cheese sandwich?”) rather than general ones (“How was your day?”) because they are easier for young children to answer. Help your child talk about past experiences to enhance memory.
- Talk with your child about where you are going in the future (“We are going to the market on the way home”) to help him or her develop thinking and planning skills.

*Memory is at the center of the cognitive universe. Every other kind of cognitive function depends on memory. Memory is bringing an experience that you've had in the world into mind. Memory is extremely important to learning because if you cannot remember, you can't acquire new abilities. Without memory you cannot store the products of learning.*

– Patricia J. Bauer, PhD, Professor of Child Development, Institute of Child Development  
University of Minnesota

*These tips were developed for Born Learning by [Mind in the Making](#), a project of the Families and Work Institute and New Screen Concepts*