

I have long been an advocate of family vacations. I try to encourage the families that I work with to take some type of vacation together as often as they can. I am a social worker. I work in the area of children's mental health. So often families that are dealing with mental health issues put all they're time and energy into treating the mental illness that they do not focus on doing regular family things. Many of the families do not have a great deal of financial resources but I try to help them discover inexpensive ways to travel. We look for deals on hotel rooms, we borrow camping equipment and we talk about packing picnic lunches which are cheaper than eating out and a good way of having fun at various wayside rests and city parks. A family that spends recreational time together improves communication skills in many areas.

My husband and I take our children on vacations at least annually. We do many of the same things that I teach my clients. Now that we have teenagers we have found that it is more fun to travel with them when they have a portable DVD player. One of our travel destinations is to go to my sister's cabin once a year for an extended weekend. This is a five-hour car ride on roads that we have been on many times. It is a much more peaceful experience in traveling since we bought a portable DVD player for each of the children for Christmas. At first I was against the idea because I thought this would cut down on their interaction, however last Christmas they both had a portable DVD player on their wish list and we found them at a great price. When they opened the player on Christmas morning we told them there would be rules around using them. They were not allowed to take them to school or to friend's homes. Also they had to help pay for some of the DVD rentals. They readily agreed to the rules and have done a great job in following them.

We have found that having the portable DVD players in the car does not cut down on their interaction, it cuts down on the arguing they used to do because they got bored sitting for five hours. They actually talk about the different movies they have watched and the trip is much more pleasant for all of us. In fact I am going to borrow one of the players the next time I fly so that the trip goes faster. The in flight movies tend to be ones that have been out for a while or something that does not interest me. The problem is going to be getting one of the kids to share their player.