

KNOW THE RULES...

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS FLYING UNACCOMPANIED



According to the airlines, more than half a million children fly alone each year. While a child's "solo" flight has all the ingredients of a memorable, exciting adventure, the purpose of this publication is to guide parents and their children in a way that will help prevent negative experiences and help ensure the child's safe and carefree journey from start to finish. Appropriate planning with the airline and your child is the best "in-flight insurance" against any unpleasant travel experiences.

To assist you in this process, it helps to know that there are some consistencies among domestic air carriers. For instance, "unaccompanied minor" is the term airlines use to refer to children younger than the age of 18 who are not traveling with an adult. All airlines require a child to be at least 5 years of age to fly unaccompanied. If the flight is not a direct one, some airlines will not allow a child younger than the age of 8 to fly unaccompanied. If the child has a direct flight, an escort fee may not be required. Airlines normally charge from \$30-\$60 to escort an unaccompanied minor to connecting flights. If two or more children are traveling together, most airlines will not charge an additional escort fee. And most airlines allow children 12 years of age or older to fly unaccompanied.

The rules noted below will help make the flying experience for your child safer and more fun for years to come.

1. When you make reservations for your child, specify that the child will be flying alone. Whenever possible, book a non-stop or direct flight. Avoid booking the last flight of the day because cancellation of such a flight may result in overnight delays. Ask for a written copy of the airline's policies and procedures for children traveling alone, and review them with your child.
2. When booking your child's flight, inquire about children's meals to help ensure that your child will enjoy the food. Also, be sure to pack a healthy, "non-messy" snack for the trip. Try to reserve a bulkhead seat, so that your child may relax and airline personnel can more easily check on him or her.
3. As with any new experience, "practice makes perfect." Thus, plan to visit the airport prior to your child's flight. Take a tour of the gate area, introduce your child to some of the people working for the airline, and explain the basics of the flying experience. Let your child know what to expect, so the experience will not be so daunting. Instruct your child to follow all of the cabin procedures and rules as explained by the flight attendant for his or her comfort and safety.
4. On the day of the flight, at a minimum, follow the airline's suggested time of arrival prior to the flight's departure. And, with the advent of additional security procedures and nature of travel with a child, you may want to arrive even earlier. Be sure to allow enough time to fill out the mandatory paperwork, pre-board your child on the plane, and ensure that your child is settled prior to general boarding. Remain at the gate until the plane takes off. Should the flight be delayed, your child will be much more comfortable in the waiting area with you than sitting onboard the plane. And if the flight is canceled or redirected, you will want to be there to make alternative arrangements.

5. Airlines will not allow your child to fly if the weather is questionable because the flight may be diverted or a connecting flight canceled. Also, remember how uncomfortable and unnerved you can feel when flying in rough weather or when there is turbulence. Thus, try to avoid these flying conditions for your child.
6. Parents must provide home and work telephone numbers, addresses, and identification. Make certain you have a back-up plan for the person(s) meeting the plane at the destination, in case they are delayed. Alert them that the airline will require photo identification prior to releasing the child. Make certain that your child knows the person he or she is flying to meet, so that an unfamiliar person does not meet him or her.
7. Some airlines provide special and supervised waiting rooms for unaccompanied children with time between connecting flights. Check to see if the airline you choose has such an area.
8. Dress your child comfortably in layered clothing, so he or she may adjust to various cabin temperatures. A change of clothing is a good idea as well. Give your child some spending money, including coins, in case of emergency.
9. Your child should have a carry-on piece of luggage or backpack to hold essentials such as identification, medications, reading materials, and games. Children may use hand-held video games when instructed by airline personnel it is safe to do so, and if the game is not noisy or intrusive to other passengers. Remote control toys are not permitted, as they may interfere with the plane's electronic equipment. Your child's photo identification and medications should be put in an envelope for safekeeping inside the carry-on luggage or backpack.



Basic safety rules that apply while flying include advising your child

- * Never to leave the gate area with someone he or she doesn't know or without the supervision of assigned airline staff.
- * Not to become too friendly with other passengers because these are people the child doesn't know. As in any social situation, it's okay for your child to be polite but restrained. Caution your child not to reveal any personal information about him- or herself to other passengers.



- * That the flight attendants are the "helping adults" to seek out when needing assistance with making restroom visits, needing answers to questions, feeling uncomfortable, or becoming confused by anything or anyone. Be sure that your child knows the flight attendant is the adult onboard who can help him or her, knows how to ask for help using the call button, and feels comfortable in asking for assistance.

1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)

www.missingkids.com

Copyright © 2000 National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). All rights reserved.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children is the national clearinghouse and resource center funded under Cooperative Agreement #98-MC-CX-K002 by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this work are those of NCMEC and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® is a registered service mark of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.