

DVDs: Now Playing in a Car near You

To DVD or not to DVD? For many car-trip-bound parents, that is the question. Is it nobler to suffer the moans and groans of “Are we there yet?” for the sake of limiting TV-viewing, or to embrace technology and allow your vehicle to become a venue for such non-Shakespearean classics as *Toy Story* and *Finding Nemo*?

“DVD players in cars are lifesavers!” says Jennifer G. Pilcher, a mother of two, of Davidsonville. “We often travel to New Jersey from Maryland to visit family. Watching a movie keeps the kids happy, which makes me a happy driver.”

Lyn Shoop, a Crownsville mother of three, is of two minds about DVD-viewing in cars.

“It really bothers me to see a mom in morning carpool or on the way to soccer



practice with the DVD running,” she says.

Yet, when Shoop sees DVDs being played on what appears to be a long family car trip, she’s much more understanding. For example, if she sees a family using them while stuck in traffic on the Bay Bridge, she assumes the family is on vacation, and the DVDs don’t bother her a bit.

Caryn Jackson’s children, meanwhile, never watch DVDs in the car.

“Kids these days are being entertained all the time. A DVD player, in my

mind, just feeds into that,” notes the Davidsonville mom.

However, a possible car trip to visit relatives in the Midwest has Jackson questioning her ban.

“The Midwest is an awful lot of nothing to put a 5- and 7-year-old through,” she admits.

Make a DVD Stance

Kids watch a lot of television. A study released last year by the media ranking service, the Nielsen Company, found that children ages 2 to 5 are glued to a TV screen an average of more than 32 hours a week, and kids ages 6 to 11 average more than 28 hours a week.

But it’s also true that parents can’t focus as well on driving when they have to manage the demands of unhappy young passengers.

Dr. Teresa M. Signorelli, a speech-language pathologist and the clinic director of the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Program at Marymount Manhattan College in New York, is not a fan of young children watching television or, by extension, DVDs in cars. But she’s also a realist.

“Parents sometimes need the distraction for their own sanity,” she acknowledges.

Signorelli suggests that DVDs in cars be accompanied by what she calls “an adult overlay.” That is, in order to engage children’s brains and build verbal skills, she says parents should, “Be like a reporter and ask their children who, what, when, where, and why questions about the characters in the movie they’re watching and the details of the story.”

Fortunately, there are ways to use portable DVD technology to make watching a video in the car a treat, and not the norm. Based on the conversations with the moms quoted in this article, here are a few suggestions on how to do just that.

Don’t buy a car with a built-in DVD player. You’ll have more luck limiting the use of a portable DVD device than you would a player that the kids see every car ride.

Set rules. Parenting author Michele Borba recommends that DVD viewing not start until a car trip passes its third hour.

Similarly, Annapolis-area mother of three Darlene McLean says the 20-minute threshold she established has helped keep her preschooler’s DVD demands under control.

When driving between Maryland and South Carolina, Debbie Boyd, of Davidsonville, lets her three daughters each pick one DVD, and she selects a fourth.

“Once all movies have been shown, the kids must resort to reading, puzzles, or naps,” says Boyd.

Be Equipped. If the children in the car vary widely in age, or if visibility is a problem, you might consider supplying each child with a DVD player. (Fewer sibling squabbles that way.)

Jill Smokler, a Baltimore mother of three kids under age 6, writes the blog scarymommy.com. She recommends getting kids used to wearing headsets. “Unfortunately, my youngest can’t stand headsets,” says Smokler. “So, the rule for DVDs in my car is that it has to be something Mommy can tolerate. I learned that lesson after a road trip to Florida with nothing but *Alvin and The Chipmunks*.”

Finally, a DVD substitute that has received high parental and educational approval is the audio book, which can be downloaded on the fly and played from laptops, MP3 players, iPods, and even cell phones.

“Audio books are great for attention and, since there are no visuals, imagination,” says Signorelli. “But we should also be doing more to encourage kids traveling in cars to just look out the window and let their minds wander and think.” **BC**

Melissa Stanton is author of *The Stay-at-Home Survival Guide: Field-tested Strategies for Staying Smart, Sane, and Connected while Caring for Your Kids* (Seal Press, 2008). Although her three children have survived several long car trips this summer without a DVD player, she expects that an upcoming road trip to Georgia will end that streak.

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