

# Planning helps avoid problems down the road

The spring and summer season is traditionally a time for families to hit the road. While traffic can create travel stress, so too can children if their needs are not accommodated.

However, with a few minor adjustments, parents can help ensure that what's going on inside the car doesn't add stress to the situation.

"Traveling with children can be an enjoyable and adventurous experience," said Dr. Shirley Rouse, a 4-H and youth development specialist in North Carolina A&T State University's Cooperative Extension Program. "However, if informed and wise planning have not taken place prior to starting the trip, traveling with children can be extremely stressful, and could contribute to a car accident."

According to Rouse, by increasing awareness of and planning for a child's needs, parents can enhance the safety and enjoyment of traveling with their children.

Discipline is mentioned by Rouse to be a priority, especially when traveling with more than one child.

"Since disruptive behavior in a car is a common childhood problem, insist upon strict discipline," said Rouse, who added that discipline becomes more important in correlation with larger numbers of children. "Establish rules and consequences, and follow them."

Rouse suggests that parents address the discipline problem by planning entertainment for their children.

"Pack appropriate car games for your children," Rouse stated. "Engage children in activities which will involve the entire family, such

as name, number and billboard games, and singing. If a child prefers to play alone, let them bring toys or a handheld computer game."

Though parents are often anxious to get to their destination, and are therefore reluctant to take travel breaks, Rouse suggests that frequent stops can make traveling with children more enjoyable.

"Stop often to allow children to release stored energy and to provide an opportunity for bathroom visits," said Rouse. "Before stopping, inform them how long the break will be."

Safety is another issue which must be addressed when traveling with children.

Rouse offers these safety-enhancing guidelines:

- When stopping, insist that adults exit the car first, so they can check for oncoming traffic and other hazards. Children tend to run immediately to release energy.

- To guard against catching fingers in doors, insist that doors be closed by adults.

- Seat belts and child car safety devices should be used, and used appropriately. Check the instructions accompanying the device or car for guidelines.

According to Rouse, parents should also be aware of and accommodate any special needs their child may have, such as special diets and medication, and susceptibility to motion sickness.

"Take just a little time to consider the needs of your children," Rouse suggests to parents. "A little planning before the trip can eliminate big problems down the road."

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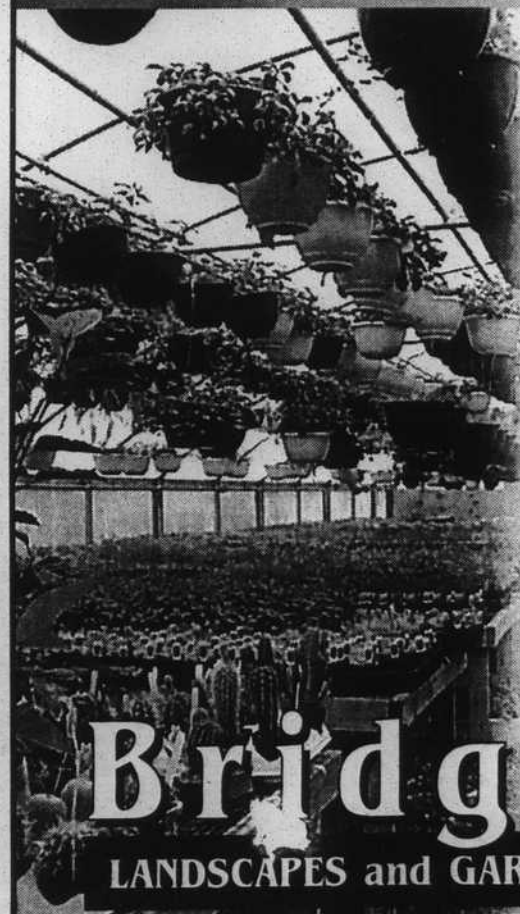
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