

BACKSEAT DRIVING

10 Games for Kids to Play in the Car

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GAMES FOR THE CAR

A good road trip can be fun for the whole family.

Children thrive when they're exposed to new things, new ideas, and new places.

What's more, years from now, your children will surprise you with just how many things they remember from the road trips of their childhood.

Whether you are traveling over the river and through the woods to grandma's house, or you are taking the proverbial family vacation to a far-flung amusement park or other destination, the memories you build today will stick with your kids for years to come.

Do you want those memories to be of fun and excitement, or do you want them to be of long hours spent bored in the car?

It's no simple thing to fly these days, and there are plenty of people who have all but given up on air travel.

Traveling at your own pace and under your own control in a personal vehicle is very appealing, but it comes at the cost of longer trip times.



A good parent, therefore, must come equipped with games to keep kids occupied while traveling.

It isn't easy to juggle magnetic board games or card game in the car, and while your kids could easily bury themselves in handheld video games on tablets or smartphones, that's not the most engaging way to travel.

It's also no way to build happy memories.

The games we've included in this book require very little in the way of special equipment.

We've kept the need for props and supplies to a minimum, focusing on games that keep your kids mentally involved.

We think you'll find these games aren't just super fun, but they help bring you and kids your closer.

By interacting and playing games, you'll not only make travel times fly by, but you'll have a lot more fun.

They say the journey is at least as important as the destination.

With our collection of popular, timeless car games, you'll not only get closer to your kids, but you'll pass the time quickly and enjoy yourselves doing so.

LICENSE PLATES

The license plate game is one of the classics of car travel.

The only materials required are a sharp eye and a halfway decent memory, although if the trip is quite long, or your kids really get into the game, you could use scratch paper or notepads to keep score.

Then, too, if you want to go for all 50 states, scratch paper is necessary just so you can tabulate who won, and when.

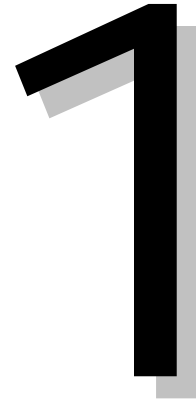
The basic game is extremely simple, and must be played during the day (or at least when there is enough light to see the license plates on other cars, for obvious reasons).

Each child, or the child and the parent, watches the other cars for their license plates.

The goal is to spot a car that a license plate from each of the 50 states.

When you spot a car with a new state, you write down that state, and the first person to collect all 50 states is the winner.

During short trips, especially trips that don't leave your home state, it would



be almost impossible to accumulate all 50, so you can modify the game accordingly.

For example, if one child was able to spot two different states and another child spotted three, that's enough of a difference to determine who won during that particular trip.

Depending on where you are in the country and how close you are to the Canadian border, you could start a list for the provinces of Canada, too.

Another way to modify the game would be to make Canadian provinces worth two points, or otherwise make these rarer plates somehow "wild" when you determine your rules and scoring system.

The beauty of a game like this is that it can be modified endlessly for the length and location of the road trip you happen to be taking.

If you're traveling on a busy highway, for example, you could assign plates to one child on the left side of the car, and assign the other child to watch only on the right side of the car.

This helps to prevent issues when both children spot the same car and try to earn the point for it, especially if the car involved is a "wild plate" with a different point value.

Another great benefit of this game is that it helps to teach younger children about geography, for both their own country and neighboring Canada (or vice versa, if you're a Canadian mom or dad reading this book).

If you're preparing for your road trip ahead of time and you want to make sure to be prepared, you could print some blank maps of the United States and/or Canada ahead of time.

There are plenty of these maps on the Internet, and you can easily find some that have the state and province borders drawn in, with and without labels.

Depending on how difficult you want to make the game, and how advanced your kids' knowledge of geography is, you could even have them fill in where on the map the state they just spotted is supposed to be.

Over very long trips, this can be a great way both to learn and have fun while passing the time

TWENTY QUESTIONS

The classic game of Twenty Questions is another of those games that almost every child is familiar with.

You don't need any particular materials or supplies to play this game, and you don't typically need a notepad or scratch paper to keep score, either.

Each round of Twenty Questions is pretty much self-contained, so as long as you can keep track of how many questions have been asked, you're all set.

This makes a great game for parents and children to play together when one parent is driving, specifically because there's nothing to occupy anybody's hands.

One player (and this is a great role for a driving parent) selects a person, place, or thing, but doesn't tell the other player(s) what that person, place, or thing is.

The other players take turns asking questions, which can only be answered with "yes" or "no."

The limitation to yes or no answers not only makes the game possible and fun, but also introduces children



to concepts of basic logic and deduction.

Giving your kids a hint can help move the game along, but this depends on the item or person chosen, as well as how old your kids happen to be.

For example, if the person choosing selects a famous person, you could let your kids figure out the category on their own, or tell them ahead of time that the category is famous people.

Questions like, "Are you still alive"" and "Are you on a television show right now" help your kids to narrow down the possibilities, while teaching them how to construct questions that, with a simple yes or no answer, actually provide them with useful clues to the answer.

The great thing about Twenty Questions is that you can use the number of questions to change how easy or hard the game is.

For small children, you could not only give them a hint as to the category (“The answer is something here in this car”) but also give them an unlimited number of questions to determine the answer, giving hints as needed to prevent them from getting frustrated (and also to help them grasp the concept of the game).

For older, more competitive children, limiting them strictly to only 20 questions determines whether a round is won or lost.

You could also count the number of questions asked, and when comparing rounds, the child who got the answer in the fewest number of questions earns more points.

Depending on how involved you want to make your scoring system, a pad and paper might be helpful to write down the counts, but most of the time you can still do all this in your head.

There are also variations on Twenty Questions, like “Who Am I?”

This is a game where the parent (or one of the kids) takes on the identity of a single famous person, while the other players try to interrogate the “famous person” to determine his or her identity.

You could limit answers to yes or no, or you could allow the “famous person” to give more details (except their name) if you want to make the game more interesting.

The famous person could be a historical personality or a political figure, if you want to teach kids about history or current events.

When playing Twenty Questions or its variations, you are limited only by your imagination.

MAKE A MAP

Children love maps... and they love to draw maps.

Almost every child goes through a “map phase,” during which they become fascinated with the idea that a large area of the world can be represented by a single picture or range of pictures.

When they discover pirates and “treasure maps,” their love of these things only increases accordingly.

It is this love of maps that the “Make a Map” gets its fun-value from, and if you have artistic children who love to draw and color, this can sometimes keep them busy for the entire trip.

You’ll need drawing materials and possibly lap desks or clipboards (or any of the many paint-and-draw sets on the market that include a hard surface to draw on).

Make sure you have plenty of paper on hand, and consider making this a sketch pad with plenty of attached sheets so that children can continue their map for some time and distance.



The thing to remember is that children don’t have the sense of scale that adults do, so they’ll tend to run out of space.

This isn’t so much a game, in that there are no winners and losers, as it is an activity that keeps children engaged with the trip itself.

To play Make a Map, you ask your children to keep a record of the trip.

Their maps will include the route, any pictures or notes about the things they see and remember, any tourist stops you make along the way, and anything else that captures their imagination.

Every child, at every level of development, will have a different take on how to do this, and being able to draw pictures of various attractions (from rest stops to any entertaining places you stop and visit along the way, to state borders and so on) will give this game “staying power” to keep them entertained.

The best part about Make a Map, however, is that when your trip is done, you’ll have some great keepsake memories drawn from the point of view of your children.

For added fun, collect the maps your children draw, tuck them safely away for a few years, and then show the maps to your kids when enough time has gone by to make the memories fun and surprising.

If you regularly take the same long trip (such as, say, a trip to Grandma’s house that involves a few hours of driving each time), you could make photocopies of your kids’ maps, pass these out at the beginning of the trip, and let them improve on their records of the journey.

Following along with a map they made themselves will also be fun and even exciting for them, as they learn about the world around them, start to grasp concepts of time and distance, and work to make their travel maps more accurate.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Scavenger hunt is one of those games that can be as complicated or as simple as you want to make it.

This game requires daylight for you to see outside of the car, but beyond that, you don't need much more to play it unless you want the game to be more complex.

The simplest way to play the game is to tell children to watch for a specific thing.

The winner is the first person to spot the thing and call it out.

For example, you could say that the first person to see a truck hauling multiple cars on it (children are usually fascinated by large vehicles like this) wins the game, or wins that round of the game.

This can become a variation on the license plate game, in that the goal could be to spot a specific license plate from a specific state or province.

You could also have your children keep their eyes peeled for exotic sports cars (this is a great option for young boys who have discovered a love of fast cars), cars with dogs in



them, or literally anything else you can imagine to have them spot.

If you want to do some preparation ahead of time, you could make scavenger hunt lists of items that you children can check off as they watch out the windows.

If you have multiple kids in the car, one way to prevent fights is to assign them different sides of the car so they don't argue over who spotted a list item first... but if you are willing to do some prep work before the trip, you can take this a step farther.

Make different scavenger hunt lists of common items, like military trucks, convertibles, state borders (if your trip will span states), and so on.

Like Bingo players who have different Bingo sheets, the first child to check off all his items wins, but because the items are different, there is no arguing over who gets credit for one of the items spotted.

If you're feeling especially creative, you could even apply the Bingo concept and create squares of scavenger hunt items in a grid.

Now, instead of the first child to check off all the items on the list, the winner is the first child to line up a few of those items in a Bingo win.

Depending on how old your kids are and how long the trip happens to be, this can be a great way to keep them intently scanning the scenery and looking to check off their lists, which can make for a fun, peaceful road trip.

Depending on how familiar you are with the route you'll be traveling, you can also sprinkle in some items that they'll be sure to spot and mark off.

For example, if you know you'll be driving past a major landmark, you can be certain to put that landmark on the scavenger hunt list.

Lists and Bingo sheets can be as simple or as elaborate as you want to make them, up to and including pictures and graphics that you cut and paste from the Internet.

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

Almost every child is familiar with Rock Paper Scissors, and if he or she isn't, this is a simple game that will provoke rounds and rounds of repetitive but entertaining play.

The basic concept, if you've never heard of the game, revolves around the three objects in the title.

A fist is a rock, a pair of fingers extended is scissors, and your palm held parallel to the ground is a sheet of paper.

Children close their hands and shake their fists at each other in time to the chant, "Rock, Paper, Scissors, Shoot!"

When the word "Shoot" is spoke, the players simultaneously make the hand sign that corresponds to the item they have chosen.

One player always wins and one player always loses, according to the properties of the three objects.

Rock defeats scissors by "breaking" the scissors (and children love to pantomime breaking the scissors with their rock fists).



Scissors defeats paper by "cutting" the sheet of paper.

Paper defeats rock by "covering" the rock.

Playing this game introduces young children to the concept of strategy, so it's a great way to encourage mental development (even in so simple a game).

Trying to anticipate what your opponent will choose, and learning that some players have favorites they use more often than others, is also entertaining and keeps the players busy for a while.

When the game starts to get too repetitive and the players start to lose interest, you can introduce new

elements to the game (as long as you determine how they win or lose).

For example, holding two fingers in the air could look like a bunny rabbit.

You could say that the bunny rabbit defeats scissors by jumping over them, but is defeated by rock because the rock is too high to jump over, but beats paper by chewing it up and eating it.

The items you add to the game are limited only by the hand signals you invent.

For example, by arranging your hand in a C-shape, you could say that this is the mouth of a crocodile.

The rule you invent for this character could then be that crocodile defeats rock by eating it, but is defeated by scissors (because scissors taste bad) and defeated by paper (because the paper covers the crocodile's eyes).

The rules don't have to make a lot of sense as long as you and your children can remember them.

Your kids will have endless fun making up their own characters, and this extends the play value of the game.

GROCERY LIST

Grocery List is one of those games that reinforces knowledge of the alphabet while also honing memory.

Relating the game to common items that kids see in the grocery store (and what kid hasn't gone with Mommy or Daddy to the grocery store) helps them to play and also keeps the list relatable.

Depending on how long the list and how complex the game, you may need scratch paper or a notepad with a pen or pencil in order to write down what your kids come up with (or you can have them write it themselves if they are old enough).

The game can also be played as a memory game, so no paper or writing instrument is needed.

(This is helpful if you are driving and you are also one of the players.)

Playing Grocery List goes like this:

The first player names an item that can be found in the grocery store, starting with the letter A.

The most common answer is "apple," but the possible options cover



anything in the store whose name starts with the letter A.

The next player lists the first item, and then identifies a second item that starts with the letter B, like "bread."

As the list grows, not only must children display an understanding of the alphabet and the order of the letters, but they have to remember what the other player said.

Each player takes turns reciting the grocery list ("Apple, bread, cookies, dog treats, eggs," etc.) and adding one item to it to make it longer.

The first player to make a mistake reciting the list, or to name a new item whose letter is out of sequence, loses the game.

The written variation of this game is a great way to drill alphabet order while also helping children to practice their penmanship.

This is a great option when you're driving with a single child, too.

The parent, while driving, goes back and forth with the child, reciting the list and adding items to it on each turn.

The child records the grocery list as the game goes on, referring back to it and practicing which letter comes next as the list goes longer.

STORY IN THE ROUND

Story in the Round is a great game that requires absolutely no materials and lends itself to wonderful flights of fancy.

If you have a recording device, like a tape recorder or video recorder (or an app on your smartphone), you could even choose to record these story sessions to enjoy later.

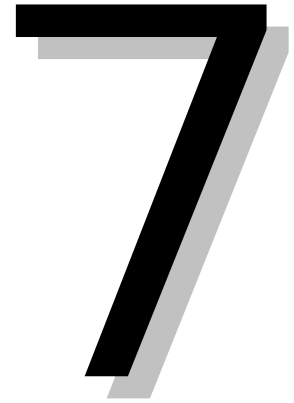
Especially as the years go by and your children get older, you will come to really cherish these stories in the round, which not only encourage imagination and the ability to construct a narrative, but also entertain kids by putting them in control of each other's ideas.

The game is simple and works like this:

The first player starts the story, introducing the characters and getting the storyline rolling.

When that player's turn is done, the second player picks up the story where the first one left off.

As you can imagine, there is a lot of potential for funny moments where players decide they don't like where the previous player's story was



heading, and they radically change the storyline by introducing funny or silly plot elements.

The stories can be as original or as complex as your kids want to make them, but you can also throw them some curves to make the game even more engaging.

For example, you could call out almost at random that it's the next player's turn, or you could use a timer and make each turn exactly the same number of minutes long.

You could also choose to interject ideas, people, or plot points at random, or when each turn begins, to keep your kids guessing and make the story more fun.

Let's say the first player starts the story, which is about a princess living in a magic castle above the clouds.

When the next player starts to take over the story, you could interject, "But then, a dragon appeared... Player 2, go!"

How the next player chooses to incorporate the plot point you have introduced is not only fun, but can also provide you with some insight into how your child's mind works.

Like so many of these games, the limits are those of your imagination only.

Story in the Round can be as freewheeling or as rigidly defined as you want it to be when you set your rules for who takes over when.

Of all the games in our list, this one's a particular favorite with children who are starting to learn about stories and the joy of telling them.

COUNT THE...

Counting is one of those games that can go on forever, or last for a short time.

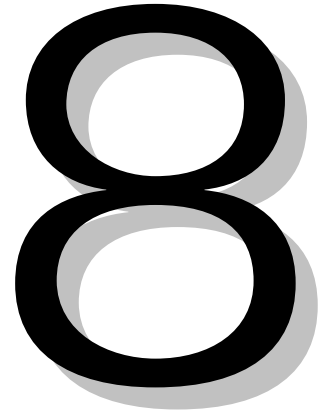
You can tailor its rules to the type of trip you are taking, and you can make the counts as small or as potentially large as you choose.

Let's say you're traveling in a rural area, so you decide to count cows.

If you have more than one kid in the car, it's a good idea to assign them different sides of the vehicle, so there are no arguments over who saw which cows.

There doesn't necessarily have to be a "winner" (especially since there is no expectation of "fairness" in terms of how many cows are grazing along the sides of the road), but counting the cows will help keep kids busy while giving them something to watch for during the trip.

If the sides of the vehicle are very different (for example, one side has the potential for plenty of cows, or telephone poles, or whatever you are counting, but the other is just the opposite side of a divided highway),



you could assign different counting items to different children. For example, one child could count cows while the other child counts horses, in rural areas, but horses could be worth 100 points while cows are worth only one (because typically you see a lot more cows than horses in rural areas).

You can devise your own rules accordingly, and adjust these depending on the results that you get.

Another way to keep the game from getting out of hand is to assign a maximum number.

The player who wins is the first player to get to 100 cows, or something

along those lines, and then the next round starts.

Limiting the counting to a certain number also helps keep the game appropriate for younger children, who are still learning to count and may not have a high maximum number to which they can count without help.

Remember that you can count literally anything you can see.

Counting cows isn't of much help if you're traveling through an urban area, but counting taxicabs might be a great alternative in that situation.

"PADITAL"

"Padital" is pronounced "puh-**did**-uhl,"

It's one of those games that has been around longer than most people can remember.

Many of us have played it as children without really knowing its origins or what "padital" is supposed to mean.

The answer is that it doesn't really mean anything.

It's just a sound that people shout out, like "Bingo" or "Yahtzee."

Playing this game requires that it be nighttime, so this is a great option for after the sun goes down.

If your kids are excited, this will help keep them occupied, and if they're tired, this game is simple enough that they can drift off to sleep while playing it and never know any different.

It's all about headlights and taillights.

A "padital" is a car with one headlight or one taillight not working.

When your child spots one of these cars at night, he or she simply calls out the word "padital" and adds a point to his or her score.



You can keep track in your head of the running score for each child, or you can just let kids entertain themselves by hunting for single headlights or taillights.

Depending on how competitive you want the game to be, you could again assign different sides of the car to each child, or you could let the first person to call it out get the point (and rule any simultaneous "paditals" to cancel each other out).

Keep in mind that if kids are yelling this out and trying to outdo each other, that doesn't make for the most peaceful car ride, and it may amp them up during a time when you are instead trying to calm them down in hopes that they'll sleep.

Still, this is a great game that requires no resources except other traffic.

It's also special because it can only be played at night, making it more of a special treat for kids.

If you want to get more complex with the point-scoring system, you could assign different points to different types of vehicles.

A tractor-trailer with a headlight out could be worth more points than a car, which is worth more or less points than a motorcycle, and so on.

You can even make rounds for the game by assigning a point threshold.

For example, the first child to get ten points worth of "Padital" wins that round.

THE QUIET GAME

Playing the “Quiet Game” is kind of a running joke among parents.

You know how it goes: A parent, weary of kids yelling or fighting, tells them that we’re going to play the “quiet game,” where the winner is the person who can stay quiet for the longest.

Well, it’s true that the Quiet Game can offer you what is a much-needed rest from a busy, loud trip, but it can also be a lot of fun for the players.

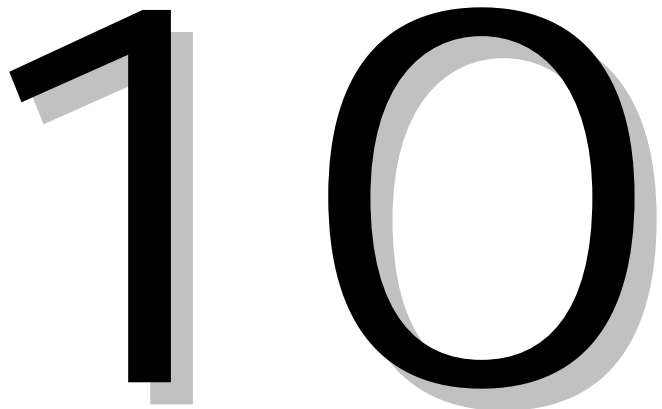
It can be played with one or more children and requires no resources, although a timer on your smartphone or watch might add another dimension to it.

When playing the game with just one child, the goal is to see how long the child can be completely silent.

You could time this to see if the child can be completely silent for a minute, five minutes, ten minutes, etc.

If the child goes the whole time period without making any noise, he or she wins the round.

This is even more fun with multiple kids, especially if you tell them that



they can try to make each other make noise by making funny faces at each other to see if they’ll laugh (as laughing means they lose the round).

One way to make this even more fun and interactive is to try and make them laugh, or get them to go “out” by answering questions.

You could, for example, start asking them questions or saying funny things to them to see if they’ll make a mistake and answer, or if they’ll crack up while you speak to them.

If you’re one of those parents who knows a lot of jokes, you could start telling jokes and see who laughs first.

In fact, a variation of the “Quiet Game” sounds a lot like the old game

show, "Make Me Laugh," in which the goal was to stay straight-faced while a comedian told funny jokes to the contestant.

You could see who laughs first, or declare all the players winners if you run out of jokes and they haven't yet laughed at one.

We hope you've enjoyed our games!

Road trips can be fun, exciting, and educational. What they should never be, however, is boring. We hope our games help you and your children enjoy your next trip in the car.

For more great products for you and your kids, be sure to visit us online at...

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