



Family Values

Seasons of Parenthood: Travel Agent

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A cafeteria lineup of activities is the regular diet of hungry, middle-years children as they explore their world outside the home for the majority of their waking hours. As a result, middle-years children, approximately six to twelve years old, turn their parents into Travel Agents. During this season, parents are responsible for navigating the safe and productive travels that create the stories children remember as their childhood.

Heading off to school is a major milestone during this period. Taking this journey with their children forces parents to relive many of the adventures they remember playing out in their own childhood. As parents revisit the smells, sounds and feelings associated with the early school years, they are able to identify more readily with the world of their children. At times they may feel helpless realizing that as Travel Agents they cannot perfectly arrange their children's journey through life to avoid suffering and disappointments.

Parents must face three central conflicts in order to succeed in this stage of the journey: adjusting to the changes that teachers, friends, and coaches, among others, make in their children's itineraries; coping with their children's normal need to navigate more and more independently; and facing the reality that their children may want to go places that they have no interest in taking them or experience in navigating themselves. Parent-teacher conferences may be experienced by the parents as much an evaluation of their parenting, as it is a report on the performance of their child.

For most parents it is difficult to let others rearrange their child's travel plans as the journey moves farther away from home. But

having a solid home base of rules and structure for their children and for themselves to return to at the end of a busy day makes a Travel Agent's life less stressful, which helps all the family stay on a mutually supportive course.

The pocket guide truths of the Travel Agent season of parenting:

Changing travel companions. Surprise! You don't know how it happened, but the folks who got on the roller-coaster ride of parenthood when you began are not the same ones with you now. Get to know these people. They will help you on the twists and turns to come.

Enjoy the view. The ride doesn't get any smoother than this, so sit back and relax. Around each turn is a new vista, an opportunity to appreciate how far and how fast you have come. The ups and downs of this part of the ride only hint at the big drop that awaits you.

Car talk. Get acquainted with your fellow passengers. There are so many new things to see, experiences to share, and people to meet that the ride stays interesting if you stay friendly and open to broadening your horizons.

Stay loose. Facing reality and living in the moment helps you appreciate the thrills of your own journey. Every roller coaster in the park has its own highs and lows. It's your perspective from a distance that makes them seem easier or harder on their riders.

Adapted from: *The Eight Seasons of Parenthood* by Barbara Unell and Jerry Wyckoff

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