How often to stop on a road trip with kids (with a free planner)

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How often to stop on a road trip with kids, how long each stop should be and where to stop, with a free planner that turns your drive into a printable timetable.

Plan a stop roughly every two hours, of about fifteen to thirty minutes, and one longer stop for a meal on a long day. Stop where children can move: a park or a visitor center beats a gas station. Peabody's free stop planner turns the hours you'll drive, your leaving time and how often you'd like to stop into a timetable you can print, with a car game for every leg. Like all of Peabody, it's free through the end of 2026.

Why every two hours?

Many drivers take a break about every two hours on a long drive, and children usually need one at least that often: for the bathroom, for a drink and for the wriggles. With a toddler, or a child who gets car-sick, plan for more. It is always easier to skip a planned stop when everyone's asleep than to find one in a hurry.

How long should each stop be?

- A quick stop, 15 minutes: bathroom, water, a stretch.
- A run-around stop, 30 minutes: a park or a rest area with grass.
- A meal stop, 45 minutes to an hour: once on a long day, around lunch or dinner.

The planner uses 20 minutes for an ordinary stop and 45 for the meal, and on a drive of four hours or more it turns the stop nearest lunch or dinner into the meal stop automatically.

Where to stop

- Parks and playgrounds a few minutes off the highway.
- State welcome centers, with maps and clean bathrooms.
- National Park Service sites along the way; many have a short trail and a Junior Ranger booklet. Peabody's Road Trip directory lists where to find them.
- Rest areas with picnic tables and room to run.

Give each leg a game

Between stops, a game makes the miles go faster. The planner suggests a different one for each leg, from I Spy to Twenty Questions, and the License Plate Game runs the whole trip. For a toddler-friendly list, see the ten best car games for kids.

Answer "are we there yet?" before it's asked

Print the plan and give it to the back seat. A child who can see "next stop: 10:30, playground" asks less often. The Are we there yet? countdown shows the time left as a little train moving along its track. For the evening, Peabody's library has stories to read at the hotel.

A sample day

Here's what the planner gives for a six-hour drive leaving at 8:00 in the morning with a stop about every two hours:

- 8:00 Leave. First leg's game: I Spy.
- 10:00 Stop for twenty minutes: bathroom, water, a run around.
- 12:20 Meal stop for forty-five minutes, somewhere with room to move.
- 3:05 Stop for twenty minutes.
- 4:25 Arrive: six hours of driving and about an hour and a half of stops.

That's nearly an hour and a half more than the map says. Telling everyone that at breakfast (and building it into the arrival time you give relatives) takes the pressure off the whole day.

With a toddler or a baby

Plan shorter legs: ninety minutes is a good place to start, and the planner has a 1½-hour option. Many families drive through a nap and stop when the toddler wakes, so a flexible plan beats a fixed one. Keep a bag with a change of clothes, wipes and snacks within reach of the front seat so a stop can be quick.

Questions grown-ups ask

Does the planner know where I'm driving?

No. It never asks where you are or where you're going, and it uses no location. It only does the arithmetic on the hours and the times you tap in.

What if we're running late?

Change the leaving time and the plan moves with it. Traffic always has its say; the plan is a guide, not a promise.

Can I save the plan?

Print it, or take a screenshot. Nothing is kept on Peabody, because nothing is sent.

Is it better to drive at night with kids?

Some families leave very early or drive through the evening so the children sleep. It can work well, but only if the driver is rested. A tired driver is never worth the saved hours.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-often-to-stop-on-a-road-trip-with-kids