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## “ARE WE THERE YET?” Parents Dread Car Journeys With Kids This Long Weekend

With thousands of Aussie families packing their bags for a road trip with the kids this long weekend, new research released by Toyota Australia shows that two out of three parents dread long car journeys with their children (Galaxy Omnibus, 2005).

In an effort to help parents better enjoy family car holidays, Toyota has appointed Child Psychologist Kimberley O'Brien, to develop tips to ensure families arrive with a smile at the destination this long weekend.

“It is not surprising that children become unsettled during long car journeys” says Ms O'Brien “Children under the age of eight years have difficulty comprehending the concept of ‘time’ ‘distance’, which often leads to whingeing and distraction for those in the driver's seat”.

According to Peter Evans from Toyota Australia, driver stress and distraction is a major cause of road accidents. “It's important for all parents to be aware of tools that will help minimise driver stress in the car, to help protect their families on our roads this long weekend”.

Ms O'Brien says there are many alternatives to keeping children amused in the car.

“For older children, long car trips are a chance to repeatedly ask ‘are we there yet?’” says O'Brien. “Be prepared to respond patiently to repeat offenders. A hand-drawn road map may serve as a helpful visual aid for inquisitive ‘backseat drivers’”.

“Kids enjoy being treated as individuals,” she explains. “Clearly place each child's name on their very own holiday pack, tailored to their age and interests, with puzzles, jokes, colouring book stickers and snacks.

“And for particularly long distances, parents may like to consider allowing their child to choose their favourite story time CD, or by investing in an in-car entertainment system for a popular

Ms O'Brien says the common practice of giving kids lollies and sugary treats on a long car trip is not a good idea. “This can cause mood swings and hyperactivity” she says. “Fights and tantrums can be avoided by packing protein-rich snacks instead, like nuts and dried fruit, cheese sandwiches and juice rather than soft drinks”. Ms O'Brien also maintains that to encourage good behaviour, it is important your children feel heard and respected.

“Children love to be surrounded by the whole family and a driving holiday has the capacity to be a memorable life time event. Family car games and sing-alongs may seem ‘daggy’ but kids love to watch their parents in holiday-mode away from daily routines and work commitments”.

Finally, Ms O'Brien suggests, “Regular breaks or ‘sanity stops’ are often a highlight of the trip, so consider your kids and seek out trees for climbing, beaches for paddling or play equipment for exercise options. Encourage children to take a good stretch, followed by some active exploration and keep on time with a running race back to the car. This will ensure your family loves the car trip even more than the destination”.

A complete list of Kimberley O'Brien's tips can be found at <http://helpfulhints.toyota.com.au>

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**Editor's Note:** Child Psychologist, Kimberley O'Brien and Peter Evans, from Toyota Australia

available for interview.

### **TOYOTA'S TOP 5 TIPS FOR LONG CAR TRIPS WITH CHILDREN**

1. Prepare a personalised activity pack for each child with content to suit their age and interests.
2. Bring healthy snacks like dried fruit and muesli bars, rather than chocolate and sugar highs to avoid mood swings and hyperactivity.
3. Encourage children to safely climb trees, run races or paddle at the beach during 'sanity breaks' to ensure maximum exhaustion in short periods.
4. For particularly long trips, consider a story time CD or favourite DVD for your in-car entertainment system.
5. Monitor your own stress levels and be patient with children when they ask, "Are we there yet?" as children under eight years are often unable to grasp the concept of 'time' and 'distance'.

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