

## Apps for haggard parents with a wailing child on a flight

December 14 2016, by Barbara Ortutay

---



In this Friday, Sept. 26, 2014, file photo, Ann Walden checks her phone as 15-month-old daughter Delphine plays while waiting in line after their flight to Baton Rouge was delayed at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. There are several ways to distract and soothe little ones when traveling by air. (AP Photo/Paul Beaty, File)

There are few things worse than getting on a plane and discovering a wailing child and a haggard parent sitting next to you. Few things, that is, except being that haggard parent of the wailing child.

As a parent who flies alone with a baby regularly, I have a lot of sympathy for fellow frazzled parents, stuck on long flights with squirmy 1-year-olds, fussy toddlers, clingy 5-month-olds or perhaps some combination of the three.

Thankfully, there are a quite a few digital and analog ways to distract and soothe your offspring. I tried several on recent cross-country flights just before my daughter turned 1. Something must have worked; at the end of one flight, an attendant told me she "didn't even notice" there was a baby in row 22.

Of course, nothing's guaranteed. On another flight, we didn't have an extra seat to stretch out on, and The Squirmy One expressed her displeasure loudly despite apps and toys.

---

## SCREEN TIME OK? OK!

Let's get this out of the way. The American Academy of Pediatrics generally frowns on screens for children under 18 months, especially without adults to guide them. But it acknowledges exceptions in a recent update. An earlier guideline called for no [screen time](#) at all. The change reflects the reality that even 1-year-olds need to video conference with grandma sometimes.

While the new guideline is better, it's still not very realistic. The pediatricians' group, apparently, has never had to fly from New York to California with a baby or needed to distract a screaming child in a car

seat. I follow the AAP's recommendations for some things, like vaccine scheduling. I don't give a hoot what it says about screen time.

As a friend with a toddler recently told me, all rules go out the window when flying with a baby. Whether it's phones, Cheetos or your car keys, I'm willing to hand my child anything that will distract her—anything safe, that is.

---

## PEEKABOO BARN

This free app for iPhones and Android was among the first mentioned in my online mom groups when I asked about long flights. Like other apps for [babies](#), it is deceptively simple for adults, but engrossing for entire minutes for the littlest ones.

Have the kiddo hold your phone, or hold it for him or her. A red barn will appear with the door closed. Some sort of farm animal will make its farm animal sound behind the door. After it knocks on the door, kiddo taps the barn door with a finger, the door opens and the animal appears. Its English name is written on the screen and pronounced with good enunciation. The door closes, and the whole thing repeats again.

VERDICT: Not bad. For my child, this app works best in screaming-in-the-car seat situations. She immediately calms down, is super excited and does a little dance when the theme music ("Old McDonald") starts playing. But it doesn't hold her interest any longer than, say, wheat puffs offered one at a time, or the zipper on my sweatshirt. After 30 seconds or so, she prefers to inspect my phone's leather cover.

---

## FISHER PRICE

The toy maker has a bevy of apps available for iPhones and Android, usually for free. I chose "Soothing Sights & Songs for Baby," as it promises to "keep your little one calm and entertained." It comes with two "games," though that's a generous description.

The one we played features cartoon sheep jumping over a fence as stars twinkle and crickets chirp. My city baby has never seen stars or sheep or heard crickets, but she seemed fairly engrossed in the app. She also realized something I didn't: If you tap the screen, a lightning bug will appear. The other game is similar, except it's an undersea world instead of sheep in a pasture, and a tap brings up bubbles instead of lighting bugs.

VERDICT: This is the baby version of the burning fireplace or the fish tank that sometimes plays on TV. Not much is happening, but it's quite relaxing if you stare at it long enough, at least for an adult. My squirmy child was moderately soothed.

---

## GUIDED ACCESS FOR GRABBY FINGERS

This setting for iPhones and iPads keeps your device in a single app, say, YouTube or Peekaboo Barn, so your child can't start deleting all your photos. It also makes it easier to let kids watch movies or videos; even if they are constantly poking the screen, the video won't pause or stop.

To set up, go to "settings," then "general" and click on "accessibility." Scroll all the way down and turn on "guided access." To start it, open the app you want to use, then triple-click the home button.

On Android tablets, you can set up a separate profile for your kid and employ a slew of parental controls, such as selecting "lock home button" to keep a kid from exiting apps. On phones you can create a guest profile with limited access.

VERDICT: I didn't know this setting existed until after the trip. Next time.

---

## ANALOG SOLUTIONS

The thing with giving your kid your phone on a long plane ride is that you can't use the phone at the same time. And I'm not ready to buy my daughter her own phone.

So I bought a set of fish-shaped "gel clings" on Amazon for less than \$10. We had oodles of fun sticking the little jiggly gel fish on the tray table and other places, then unsticking them. Repeat until bored. All I had to do was keep them out of her mouth.

VERDICT: You probably don't need apps for a baby to survive a flight, but because they are free, and if you don't mind some "screen time," it's worth a shot. But any app will distract a baby for only so long. Older kids are more likely to pay attention to apps and videos—though they might need more advanced apps.

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Apps for haggard parents with a wailing child on a flight (2016, December 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-12-apps-haggard-parents-child-flight.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.