

## Talk, Read and Play – Three Steps to Reduce Childhood Anxiety

My children and I were so excited to be going on a spring break vacation to sunny Arizona. My father is a snowbird who spends each winter in Phoenix and this would be our first trip since my youngest was an infant. As I was booking our plane tickets and imagining the trip my stomach tied in a knot as I realized we would have to go through airport security. My four year old can be quite clingy. New experiences are hard for him, especially if he is scared. I knew he would need to walk through the airport security metal detector on his own so I pulled out my trusty early childhood teaching tools: talk, read and play.

**Talk:** As I was telling my children about the trip we talked a lot about the airport. I explained each step in the airport security screening - first we take off our shoes and coats and put them through an x-ray machine; then we walk through the metal detector... I kept it simple. Visual information (facial expression, gesture, pictures) brings words to life. I did a little digging on YouTube and found some child-safe video clips of people putting their belongings through x-ray and walking through the metal detector.

**Read:** We visited our friendly neighbourhood library and took out some children's picture books about travelling by plane. They didn't cover all the ins and outs of airport security but they provided more pictures, information and the stories were fun to share!

**Play:** We pretended to go on a trip. We packed our suitcases, drove to the airport and pretended to go through security. The bathroom door frame became the walk-through metal detector and a big bubble wand became the wand metal detector. We took turns being the passengers and the security staff. It was fun!

In the end, the trip was a blast and airport security was a breeze. My son knew what to expect and what was expected of him. He looked nervous walking through the metal detector but once through his big smile showed his pride.

Talking, reading and playing before a new experience like visiting the dentist or starting kindergarten helps reduce the anxiety children naturally feel. Sometimes as parents we forget to tell our children what behaviour we expect from them. Talking, reading and playing also helps children know how to behave.

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Date: April 29, 2014