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# Leaving the kids...

**A**s I sat in the airport watching a mother of three juggle her kids and all their bags, I couldn't help but miss the extra baggage I had left behind. Greg and I rarely travel without the kids. Up until a year or two ago, we never went anywhere without our three little ones in tow. Now that Jude, 11, Riley, 10, and Maggie, 6, are getting older, I thought it would be easier to leave them occasionally.

I am very fortunate to have my parents close by, and even more fortunate that they love being with the children. When they are not available, my sister and her family pitch in. In this respect, I am very lucky. Still, although I thoroughly enjoy the alone time with my husband, I often wonder if the emotional roller coaster endured before, during and after the trip is worth the time away.

The emotional battle of leaving them starts about a week before I depart. I start to have nightmares that something is going to happen to them or that I am going to miss a life-changing event.

There are many books — such as "Helping Your Child Overcome Separation Anxiety or School Refusal: A Step-by-Step Guide For Parents," by Andrew R. Eisen, Linda B. Engler and Joshua D. Sparrow — that offer coping mechanisms. I have also found many articles that offer simple steps to help myself and the kids deal with separation issues. And it has helped.

Here are a few suggestions I have found:

- Before you leave, find some quality time (as little as 10-15 minutes will

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## DISCIPLINE WHILE YOU'RE AWAY

My parents do a great job of disciplining the kids when we are away, but there have been times when the children take advantage of our absence. Parenting is not always easy, but disciplining from afar is really tough. I haven't managed to balance this one yet. If anyone has suggestions for dealing with misbehavior in their absence, I would love to read your post on [GulfCoast.MomsLikeMe.com](http://GulfCoast.MomsLikeMe.com).

do) to spend talking or playing with your child.

- Ask your children how they feel about you leaving and then discuss their feelings, fears or excitement with them.

- Share your feelings with your child. If you tend to be overly anxious, be careful not to instill this anxiety in your child.

- Let them know where you will be and when you will be contacting them. Will you call in the morning before they go to school or in the evening?

- If they are old enough to write, create a temporary e-mail account so that

you can write them messages.

- Leave them something behind to let them know you care: a note on their pillow, a small stuffed animal or a new T-shirt.

A dear friend recently told me she plays Webkinz, the online world of stuffed animals, with her children when she is away. She says they love the interaction and she often sends them gifts or postcards from her online pet to theirs. She says it really helps them deal with her absence.

Even with all the help and tips to deal with the emotional baggage that comes with traveling, I still struggle a bit with leaving and with the issues that arise when I am gone.

All in all, I am grateful Greg and I have the ability and family support to occasionally travel. It sure helps our relationship to be able to focus on us for a while. As for the planning, recuperation and separation anxiety, I will have to continue to find a careful balance. 

