By Sharon Miller Cindrich

Q: We have a portable DVD player that we use on family car trips, but now every time we hit the road—even for a quick errand—the kids are scrambling to watch the tube. Any ideas on how to break this habit?

Pulling the plug completely is one way to curb your kids' on-the-road viewing habits, but if you want to encourage moderation, here are some alternate routes:

Set time limits.
Make a general rule that any trip under 30 minutes (or 30 miles) must be TV-free. Let kids figure out mileage and the approximate time of your errand route. For longer trips, require a two-hour drive before popping in video entertainment.

Make it a drive-in(g) movie.
On longer trips, reserve movie watching for after hours. During the day, kids can enjoy the rolling scenery, but once the sun goes down, break out the popcorn and let kids snuggle in for a movie treat.

Try audio books.
A great way to keep kids entertained but still engaged, audio books allow kids to keep their eyes on their surroundings but get lost in the story. Even the driver can enjoy these, making it a family activity. Visit your neighborhood bookstore or library before your next road trip, or reserve audio books online (SacLib.org).

Preview your destination.
If you're heading to the beach, look for educational DVDs on ocean life. Visiting a new state? Call the department of tourism and ask for a free promotional DVD on the area, or see if the library has something in stock. Heading to Yosemite or the Grand Canyon? Look for documentaries about parks, historic sites you may see, or different cultures kids can learn about on the way.

Watch your own movies.

Encourage kids to create their own feature flick to watch on a trip. Suggest a connection with your destination, or have them film a puppet show. If you're on vacation, let kids create a slideshow or documentary about their experience, and watch it on the way home. They can add their own fun commentary.

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