



Before you put your child on a plane

- Make sure your child has a copy of his itinerary and knows where he's supposed to be going and who is picking him up. (There have been cases where unaccompanied minors have been sent to the wrong city. Even a 7-year-old should be able to speak up if he knows he's supposed to be going to visit his dad in Cleveland and the pilot just announced they're going to Pittsburgh.)
- Make sure your child has a working cell phone and a card with the numbers for you and your backups, in case you are momentarily unavailable, and for those charged with meeting them at their pickup point.
- A temporary credit card -- like Visa TravelMoney -- may be a good bet.
- Pack plenty of food and entertainment in their backpacks. Airlines are increasingly stingy with the snacks they offer and with tarmac delays your child could be stranded for hours without anything to eat. A portable DVD player and movies is always a good bet.
- Stash something new in their backpack, along with a sweatshirt and a clean T-shirt.
- Request a "gate pass" to go through security with your kids and wait with them until they board.

Just don't count on a goodbye kiss.

TIP FOR PARENTS: Book kids and teens on the earliest nonstop flight of the day. But before you do, Google your airline carrier to check their rules for unaccompanied minors, each airline has different regulations and fees. Southwest Airlines, for example, doesn't charge a fee but only permits children flying alone on direct flights. Once they are 12, they are on their own. "If a parent feels a young teen isn't capable of making the trip alone, they should seriously consider making the trip with them or send the teen with another family member or friend," says Southwest spokesman Linda Rutherford.

Other airlines, like Northwest and Delta, require children up to age 15 to fly as unaccompanied minors and charge \$75 each way on connecting flights. Parents can opt to pay for the service for kids up to 17 -- not a bad idea these days on connecting flights, no matter how much the kids object.