Who owns the middle seat arm rests on an airplane, really? How do you break away from the marathon talker in seat 12E? And what do you do, if anything, about the angelic-looking child kicking the back of your seat?

Incivility and rudeness are often the product of stress, and there are few situations more primed for stress these days than travel - especially air travel.

Once glamorous, air travel is now a test of patience, and sometimes even endurance. Today's travellers face the reality of rigorous security procedures on top of flight delays and cancellations, anxiety about flying, cramped seating and reduced or no meal service.

How to cope? Patience, courtesy and flexibility, and a sense of humour will serve you well. While you may have little or no control over long security lines, weather delays, the cabin environment or your choice of seatmate, you can control how you react to adversity.

All the more reason to come as prepared as possible to circumvent predictable problems. Here are a few tips, both defensive and offensive, to get you through your travels with less stress and more civility.

- Arrive early. This may be obvious, but it's often undervalued. As your stress level rises your capacity for tolerance and civility often decreases.
- Stay calm if your gate agent gives you bad news. Losing your temper won't get you there faster, and it may lose you the sympathy of the one person who could possibly pull some strings.
- Dress and pack with security in mind to avoid delaying other passengers. Do your homework on current screening procedures and airline policies for checked and carry-on

luggage. There are still clueless passengers who pack large bottles of liquids in their carry-on luggage-a nuisance to everyone behind them. Wear shoes that are easy to take on and off, and keep items you may have to remove from your luggage for screening, such as laptops, readily accessible. This keeps the line moving, which keeps tempers calm. If you're a frequent traveller who knows the drill, be patient with those who are new at this-they may be nervous.

- If you can't choose your environment, create your own. Bring an eye shade for napping, and use headphones to listen to music or movies (whether in the terminal or on the plane), or earplugs to block out unwanted conversations. If your seatmate won't stop chatting with you, smile and say, "Well, it's been nice speaking with you. I'm going to read for a bit now."
- Do your fellow travellers a favour and step away from others in the terminal to take cell phone calls, and keep calls brief while in security lines or taxi-ing to the gate after landing.

- The middle seat arm rests are shared property. That said, it's generous for the aisle and window seat holders to give the middle passenger a chance to claim them first
- Travelling is trying for adults, and even more so for children. Crying babies are part of the air travel package, so it's a good idea to stash some earplugs in your carry on. However, if a child is kicking the back of your seat, it's okay to ask their parent to have them stop. Smile and say, "I know it's tough for kids, but would you mind asking him not to kick the seat? Thanks." Keep it short and offer some understanding, and it's likely the parent-and child-will comply

- Reading over someone's shoulder is nosy and intrusive. Avoid the temptation and come prepared with books, magazines, or a laptop of your own. Privacy filters for computers and smart phones will bar wandering eyes. If 6A is taking an unhealthy interest in your screen, meet his gaze briefly. This will jolt his awareness - the best medicine for rude behaviour.
- With airlines cutting back on complimentary in-flight meals and snacks, the smart traveller packs his own. Avoid foods with strong odours that may bother your neighbours though, such as tuna fish, egg salad, or a garlicky meatball sub-enjoy these in the terminal instead. Due to the prevalence of nut allergies, it's best to avoid these snacks altogether.

You can't always choose your neighbours on the plane or in the boarding area, but you can take responsibility for your own comfort and come as prepared as possible.

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