



Green Me Up, JJ

"Advice for Greenies in a Complicated World"

By Jenny Price | January 23, 2010

Dear JJ:

My 8-year-old son Rory wants to play in a baseball league, but the closest one is two towns away—28 miles! My wife wants to do it, but I think it's more important that Rory knows about climate change and learns how to act responsibly. Please advise!

Jason Warming up in Wallula, Washington

Dear Jason:

Ah yes, this is a tough question—and it's exactly the sort of argument that families are having more and more these days. Happily, I can suggest two easy ways you might solve it, though:

One, carpool.

Or two, you might try a simple and very useful equation that two UC-Berkeley math whizzes have just developed. Amazingly, it empowers families to calculate the answers to just these sorts of dilemmas.

Here's how it works. First, you have to figure out your family warming coefficient (FWC).

To do that, you take the weight in grams of your heart, add the weight of your wife's heart times 2, and multiply by the volume (in cc's) of your child's dreams. Multiply by the number of things that you value half or more as much as doing your part to reduce carbon—e.g. family, friendship, health, travel, chocolate. Then sit your child down and explain that the world as we know it is going to end if we don't stop doing things like driving 8-year-olds 56 miles round-trip to play baseball. Add the weight of the child's guilt to the previous total.

OK, that's your FWC—which you can now use to calculate answers to the specific questions that come up in your family— e.g., How far is too far for Little League?

In this case, you're almost there. Just add together the distance one-way to the game, the weight of the vehicle you plan to drive, and the weight of the people and equipment times 2 inside it. Multiply this sum by the gas mileage, and divide by 2 if it's a hybrid vehicle (or multiply by 2.3 if the hybrid gets ≤ 6 mpg more than your other or last vehicles). Add half the air miles you've flown in the past 15 months (multiply by 1.5 for business class, 2 for first class), and subtract the number of offsets you purchased and immediately add back the same number. Subtract the square root of the number of children that you and your wife have decided not to have primarily because of their energy demands. Now add the distance that all the grandparents will drive or fly (multiply by 3.2 if they fly) to their grandchild's games in the course of the season, and subtract the number of deceased grandparents times 3. Then divide by the combined total weight of Moms and apple pies in your town that will compensate for the absence of baseball.

Got it? Then just multiply that number by your FWC:

0-1000: play ball 1000-2000: OK if you convert the car to vegetable oil (or ≥1 grandparent gets sick) 2000+: personally responsible for a .004-inch rise in sea level if you play

Or carpool. Let us know what you decide!

Green Me Up, JJ is an occasional advice column. You can <u>e-mail JJ</u> with your burning questions about how to act and think environmentally smart in our complicated 21st-century world.