

Family Outings and Vacations

Introduction

Day outings and vacations can be a great way for members of a family to connect with one another. Many children enjoy going to the zoo, or taking a vacation to visit an amusement park. The tips we talk about today can be used in many different settings, including amusement parks, museums, zoos, movie theaters, camping and the beach and pools.

Amusement Park, Museums and Zoos

Amusement parks, museums and zoos can be a whole lot of fun for children, but they can also be overwhelming and over stimulating. Here are some ideas to consider if you are planning such a trip.

- **Go during off-peak times:** Many parks and museums have off-peak seasons when the lines are shorter. If you can, schedule your visit during the off-peak season to make it a more enjoyable experience for everyone. Many amusement parks list these dates on their website. Avoid going during major holidays as the lines are the longest then.
- **Special needs days:** Some amusement parks, zoos, museums and even movie theaters have scheduled special needs days for children with disabilities. You can call ahead to get the schedule and plan a day trip or vacation accordingly.
- **Disability passes:** Many parks also have a disabilities pass that allows you to skip lines and use a separate entrance for rides. You may need a letter from your child's physician, so call ahead to ask about these passes. If you are going to need to stand in long lines, you can carry small toys to keep your child busy and have some snacks handy in case they get hungry.
- **Spend multiple days:** Amusement park tickets can be very expensive, but if you can afford it, you could consider buying multi-day tickets rather than trying to do everything in a single day. This will be less tiring and overwhelming for your child, and you will be able to take more breaks and have a shorter day at the park.
- **Prioritize attractions:** For day trips to the museum or zoo, plan ahead with your child and identify things they really want to see and do. That way, you can head straight for their favorite attractions, instead of trying to do everything in a single day.
- **Plan meals and rest stops:** You can research dining options in and around a park in advance, to know where you may want to go for meals. If your child has special dietary requirements, you can

call the park to get a list of places inside where they can accommodate your child's dietary restrictions. Many parks have special menus for people with dietary restrictions.

- **Noise canceling headphones:** If loud sounds bother your child, you can use noise canceling headphones for your child to wear in louder places, such as wait areas for rides, or crowded restaurants.
- **Look out for sensory triggers:** Many rides can have loud sounds and flashing lights that may act as triggers for your child. Many parks list these triggers near the entrance. You could also ask guest services for a written list when you enter the park.
- Work on "**staying with me**" as discussed in the beginning about taking car trips.

Amusement parks can be overwhelming for children of all ages, and the key to having a good time, is to go at a reasonable pace, with frequent breaks.

Beaches and Pools

Safety is a major concern for all children when they are around water. To ensure you child can safely enjoy being at the beach or a pool, you can:

- Teach them to swim at an early age.
- Be mindful of them at all times near the water and never leave them unattended, even if they are strong swimmers. It is important that they learn never to go in the water unless they have an adult with them.
- Teach them to notice and understand safety signs and be mindful of strong currents and waves.

Movie Theaters

Many movie theaters offer special needs days where "sensory friendly" accommodations are made for children with special needs. These can include well-lit aisles, and a reduced volume for the movie. Children can also move about and talk if necessary without disturbing others. You can call theaters near you to see if they schedule special needs viewings.

Camping

Camping with children can be a great way to introduce them to the outdoors. Wandering and meals can be a real concern for parents of children with autism, so here are some ideas to think about when planning a camping trip.

- To prevent a child from wandering at night, you can share a large tent and use a lock on the

zippers to prevent them from opening the tent at night and leaving.

- Electricity hookups are also available at some campsites. This would allow you to use soft lighting or music to help your child sleep at night.
- Find a campsite that allows easy access to a grocery store. That way you can buy your child's staple foods as needed without having to worry about refrigeration.
- Prepare your child by using social stories so that they know what to expect on a camping trip.
- Take along comfort items such as a favorite blanket or soft toy to make bedtime easier for your child.
- Create a buddy system to ensure that your child always move about with a buddy and is not alone. This can prevent wandering during hikes and walks.

Hotel Stays

Picking the right hotel can make a difference to your child. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- **Allergen-free environment:** You can call ahead to check with a hotel about allergen free rooms. These could include rooms that do not have plants or flowers, irritating chemicals and use special bedding.
- **Comfortable Bedding:** You can ask a hotel about the type of bedding they use. If your child is sensitive to the feel of new sheets and pillows, you can take your own with you and use them at the hotel.
- **Child-safe rooms:** Many hotels offer child-safe rooms. You can call ahead to ask them to remove furniture with sharp ends.
- **Requesting extra amenities:** Some hotels will accommodate special requests, such as a mini fridge or a microwave in the room if you call ahead. Having these amenities may make it easier for you to quickly prepare a snack that your child likes.

Conclusion

Road trips and vacations can be a lot of fun with a little planning. It is impossible to account for everything that may disrupt a trip, but preparing in advance and thinking through what you can do to make it easier for you child, can go a long way. We hope you have found this information useful. You can find additional resources on our website,

www.porchlighteducation.org.