

Exploring Family Experiences Across Ages

Understand the options. Consider your family's needs. Choose what fits.

What are family experiences?

A family experience can be a visit to a museum, an afternoon at a park, a game night, or cooking a new recipe together. Different experiences offer different possibilities. None is better than another, and no family needs to do a certain number of them. This guide explains what an experience may involve so you can choose what fits your family's interests, budget, abilities, and time.

Six kinds of experiences to explore

Museums, Libraries & Learning Places Children's museums, science and history museums, art museums, libraries, and heritage sites. Some are hands-on and lively. Others are quiet. Admission varies.	Outdoors, Nature & Animals Parks and playgrounds, trails, beaches and lakes, gardens, camping, picnics, zoos, and aquariums. Weather and season matter.	Attractions & Entertainment Amusement parks, water parks, family entertainment centers, and movies. These often involve more crowds, lines, and cost, and may have height or age rules.
Arts & Culture Live performances, festivals and community celebrations, and making art.	Movement & Recreation Swimming, skating, biking, bowling, miniature golf, and recreational sports.	Everyday Family Experiences Cooking and trying new foods, game nights, exploring a neighborhood, and themed experiences at home.

Thinking about ages

These ages are reference points, not rules. Children vary within every range, and an experience marketed to one age group can still work for others.

0 to 2	Short, sensory, close to a caregiver.	11 to 12	More choice, time with friends, and a say in the plan.
3 to 5	Hands-on, pretend play, and repeating favorites.	13 to 17	A bigger role in planning, chances to lead, or time with friends and family.
6 to 10	Building, games, and growing independence.	Adults and multigenerational families	Seating, rest, pace, and the interests of every generation.

Before you choose, separate three things

- Development.**
What a child might enjoy or try.
- Provider rules.**
Age minimums, height limits, and supervision rules. Each venue sets its own, so ask.
- Safety and access.**
What a setting needs for your family to take part safely and comfortably.

What research says, and does not say

- An American Academy of Pediatrics report describes play as linked to executive function, social-emotional skills, language, and self-regulation.
 - The CDC recommends 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day for ages 6 to 17.
 - In the sources reviewed, research on specific outings was limited.
- No experience guarantees better grades, closer relationships, or less stress. What a family gains depends on the child, the adults, the setting, and the day.

Cost and access: Many parks, libraries, and community events are free or low cost. Some museums offer reduced admission. Through [Museums for All](#), participating museums offer reduced admission to visitors who present a SNAP/EBT card. Check the program site for participating museums and current details. Ask any venue about step-free entry, quiet spaces, sensory-friendly times, seating, restrooms, and changing facilities. Availability varies. For help planning and budgeting an outing, see Parent Guide 09. For travel, see Parent Guide 10.



My Family Experience Planning Worksheet

A printable space to think through options before you choose. Write on it, keep it, or share it with your family. OH FAMILY does not collect what you write.

1 Who is coming?

Names and ages:

What matters for our group (check any):

- ☐ Children of different ages ☐ A grandparent or older adult ☐ Mobility needs
☐ Sensory sensitivities ☐ Other: _____

2 What interests us?

One interest from each person:

3 What do we need to plan for? (Check any)

- ☐ Budget ☐ Quiet space or breaks
☐ Transportation or parking ☐ Food or allergies
☐ Time available ☐ Restrooms or changing facilities
☐ Weather ☐ Other: _____
☐ Accessibility needs

4 Ideas we are considering

Experience	Why it interests us	What we want to find out

5 Questions to ask the venue (check the ones we need)

- ☐ Which ages are the exhibits or areas designed for? ☐ Where are restrooms and changing facilities?
☐ What does it cost, and are there reduced-price options? ☐ Can we bring food and water?
☐ Is there a quieter time or a sensory-friendly session? ☐ Are there age, height, or supervision rules?
☐ Are the entrance, paths, and seating accessible? ☐ How long do families usually stay?

6 Our backup plan

If it is too loud, crowded, or tiring, or the weather changes, we can:

7 Our choice

Experience: _____ Date: _____

Who will check the details: _____

Learn more from trusted sources

American Academy of Pediatrics: The Power of Play

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20182058/38649/The-Power-of-Play-A-Pediatric-Role-in-Enhancing>

AAP HealthyChildren.org: Playground Safety

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Safety-on-the-Playground.aspx>

CDC: Physical Activity Guidelines for School-Aged Children and Adolescents

<https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/>

Museums for All: About

<https://museums4all.org/about/>

Explore further with OH FAMILY

<https://www.ohfamilyinc.org> – visit Explore & Connect for additional ideas and family resources. A longer companion publication with profiles of individual experiences may follow.

About this guide

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Disclosure: This guide offers general educational information about family experiences. It does not recommend, rank, or endorse any venue or activity, and it is not medical, legal, or financial advice. Costs, rules, and availability change, so confirm details with the venue. Every family's needs differ.