



EXPLORE & CONNECT

OH FAMILY's Guide to Exploring Family Experiences

33 kinds of family experiences, with what to expect, what to ask, and how to adapt.

About this guide



Families do things together in many ways. This booklet describes 33 kinds of family experiences, from museums and parks to cooking and volunteering. Each profile helps you decide whether an experience might suit your family and how to prepare for it.

The booklet does not rank experiences. It does not promise outcomes. It does not tell families what to do, and it does not define what a family is.

How to use this guide

- **Start where you are.** Use the table of contents, the situation index, or the sensory-friendly index.
- **Each profile follows the same order.** At a glance, What to Expect, What Children Might Explore, Across Ages, What Adults Might Enjoy, What Families Might Experience Together, Evidence Notes, Potential Considerations, Ways to Adapt, Before You Go, Related, and Sources.
- **“Might” means possibility.** The sections “What Children Might Explore,” “What Adults Might Enjoy,” and “What Families Might Experience Together” describe possibilities. They are not findings.
- **Ages are reference points.** Children vary widely within each range.
- **Cost is shown in words, not dollars.** Prices change and differ by place. Check with the venue.
- **Use the planning tools.** Four one-page tools support choosing and preparing. They are blank and collect no data.
- **Look up details.** Hours, prices, rules, and programs change. Check with the venue before you go.

More from OH FAMILY

OH FAMILY’s Parent Guide blog posts point families to the Parent Guides. Read them at ohfamilyinc.org/blog/categories/parent-guides.

Evidence key



Statements in the Evidence Notes carry one of three labels.

Established evidence	A statement from a source I opened, such as guidance from a government agency, a professional organization, or a published review. The source and its date are named. This is not a guarantee.
Potential benefit	A possibility. It is not a finding, and what a family gets depends on the family, the setting, and the day.
Practical consideration	Common-sense information, such as what to ask or bring. It may not have a source.

Every Evidence Notes section ends with “What this guide does not claim.” In most profiles, I did not find research on outcomes from the experience itself, and the profile says so.

How sources were chosen

- Every research statement traces to a source I opened.
- I prefer newer sources. Where a source was dated 2020 or earlier and I found no newer one, I removed its specific statements and link the organization’s general website.
- A CDC reference appears only where a CDC page on that topic exists.
- Undated pages from official bodies that were live and current are kept and flagged in the source list review.
- Where a profile has no source, it says so.
- Sources are listed in APA style with links in each profile and in the combined list at the back.

33 family experiences



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CATEGORY 1 OF 7

Museums, Libraries & Learning Places

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Children's Museums

SETTING

Mostly indoor. Some have outdoor areas.

TYPICAL TIME

Varies. Many families stay one to a few hours, or split a visit across two days.

COST

No cost to higher cost. Reduced-price options exist at some museums.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often lively and noisy. Quieter times or sensory-friendly sessions may be available.

What to Expect

The Association of Children's Museums describes a children's museum as "a nonprofit educational and cultural institution committed to serving the needs and interests of children," with exhibits and programs "that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning."

In practice, most children's museums are built for touching, building, pretending, and moving. Exhibits might include water tables, climbing structures, pretend shops or kitchens, building areas, art spaces, and areas for the youngest children. Some have staff or volunteers who run activities, performances, or special events.

Museums differ a great deal in size, theme, and the ages their exhibits are designed around. A small local museum may have a handful of rooms. A larger one may fill a full day.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities. Not every museum has each one.

- **Senses:** water, sand, light, sound, texture.
- **Pretend play:** acting out roles in shop, home, or workplace settings.
- **Building and problem-solving:** ramps, blocks, gears, and challenges with more than one solution.
- **Movement:** climbing, crawling, balancing.
- **Making:** drawing, painting, or building with simple materials.
- **Being with other children:** sharing space, taking turns, watching how others play.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Short, close to the caregiver. Soft areas, sensory play, and watching other children. Some museums have a dedicated area for the youngest visitors.
3 to 5	Pretend play and hands-on exploring. Often the age range museums design around.
6 to 10	Building, testing, and challenge exhibits. Some children begin reading labels or following their own questions.
11 to 12	Self-directed exploring. Some children find exhibits aimed at younger children less interesting. Others enjoy a favorite exhibit, helping a younger sibling, or special programs.
13 to 17	Many exhibits are designed for younger children. Teens may enjoy a museum with a maker space, a teen program, or a volunteer role. Ask what is offered.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can play alongside, observe, or take turns leading. A grandparent might enjoy sharing a favorite exhibit with a grandchild.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

exhibit age ranges, height limits, and adult-supervision requirements are set by each museum. Ask before you go.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

small parts, climbing areas, and crowds may affect how close an adult needs to stay. Ask about stroller, wheelchair, and sensory access.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing alongside a child and seeing what holds their interest.
- Noticing how a child approaches a problem.
- Learning something new from an exhibit, since many include layers for older visitors.
- Talking with other caregivers.
- Sharing a place with a child or grandchild and following their lead.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Building or testing something as a team.
- Wondering aloud together: “What do you think will happen?” or “How could we try that a different way?”
- Taking turns choosing the next exhibit, so each person gets a pick.
- A shared reference point afterward, such as a favorite exhibit to talk about at home.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE (ABOUT PLAY IN GENERAL, NOT MUSEUMS)	An American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report on play (Yogman et al., 2018, reaffirmed January 2025) describes play as linked to executive function, social-emotional skills, language, and self-regulation. It encourages child-led play with responsive adults.
LIMITS	The report states that its animal brain research cannot be directly extrapolated to humans. It also says more research is needed on whether play can buffer toxic stress in people.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from children's museum visits specifically. This guide does not state that a museum visit will improve learning, school performance, or family relationships.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A visit may offer opportunities for the kinds of play described above. What a child or family takes from it depends on the child, the adults, the exhibits, and the day.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:	Prices differ by museum. Many offer memberships, free or discounted days, or library passes. Ask. Museums for All is a national program in which participating museums offer reduced admission to visitors who present a SNAP/EBT card. Terms and eligibility can change, so check museums4all.org for participating museums and current details.
Crowds and noise:	Weekends, school breaks, and school-group days tend to be busier. Ask when it is quieter.
Waiting:	Popular exhibits and timed entry can mean waiting. Some museums sell tickets for set times.
Transportation and parking:	Check parking costs, transit options, and distance from drop-off.
Accessibility:	Ask about step-free entry, elevators, space for wheelchairs and strollers, quiet spaces, and sensory-friendly hours. Some museums offer sensory-friendly sessions. Availability varies.

Restrooms and changing:	Ask about changing tables, family restrooms, and feeding spaces.
Food and drink:	Policies on outside food, water bottles, and food allergies vary.
Time:	A shorter visit can work well. Children often have a favorite area.
Age-related rules:	Some exhibits have age or height limits. Many museums require an adult to stay with children. Some host adult-only evenings.

Ways to Adapt

Shorter or split visits:	Pick one or two areas and leave while energy is still good.
Quieter times:	Go at opening or on a weekday if you can. Ask about sensory-friendly sessions.
Preparing in advance:	Look at photos or the museum map together. Talk through what you will do and how you will leave.
Mixed ages:	Agree on a meeting spot and a time to regroup. Let older children help younger ones, or give each child a time to lead.
Sensory needs:	Bring what helps your family, such as ear protection, a comfort item, or a break plan.
Lower cost:	Ask about reduced-price programs, free days, or library passes. Visit a smaller local museum or a library program.
At home:	Build a water table in a tub, a pretend shop at the kitchen table, or a ramp from cardboard.

Before You Go

- ☐ Which ages are the exhibits designed for?
 - ☐ What does admission include, and are there discounts or reduced-price programs?
 - ☐ Is there a quieter time or a sensory-friendly session?
 - ☐ Do I need to stay with my child at all times?
 - ☐ What is the plan for strollers, wheelchairs, and mobility devices?
 - ☐ Where are restrooms, changing tables, and feeding space?
 - ☐ Can I bring food and water?
 - ☐ How long do families usually stay?
-

Related

[Parent Guide 09](#) (Planning Affordable Family Adventures). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Science, natural history and history museums (profile 2).

Sources

Association of Children’s Museums. (n.d.). *Home*. <https://www.childrensmuseums.org/>

Museums for All. (n.d.). *About Museums for All*. <https://museums4all.org/about/>

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20182058.

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

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Science, Natural History & History Museums

SETTING

Mostly indoor. Some have outdoor areas.

TYPICAL TIME

Varies. A short visit to one gallery can work, and larger museums can fill a day.

COST

No cost to higher cost. Special exhibits or shows may cost extra.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Hands-on halls can be lively. Galleries can be quieter.

What to Expect

These museums share a focus on understanding the world through objects, stories, and demonstrations, but each type feels different.

- **Science museums** often have hands-on stations and live demonstrations.
- **Natural history museums** often display fossils, minerals, animals, and habitats.
- **History museums** often display objects, photographs, and stories about people and places, from the distant past to recent decades.

Some museums combine these. Many also have special exhibits, films, or shows that need a separate ticket.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities. Not every museum has each one.

- **Testing and wondering:** pushing, pulling, building, and noticing what happens.
- **Looking closely:** at bones, shells, rocks, tools, clothing, or everyday objects from another time.
- **Connecting to their own lives:** finding something that looks like home, or something completely new.
- **Asking questions:** why, how, and what happened next.
- **Stories of people:** learning how others lived, worked, and solved problems.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking, pointing, and listening to a caregiver describe what they see. Hands-on areas may offer more for this age than quiet galleries.
3 to 5	Short visits to favorite exhibits, repeating things, and asking many questions.
6 to 10	Following a topic of interest, using activity sheets or scavenger hunts where offered, and trying experiments.
11 to 12	Choosing their own route, reading more of the labels, and taking interest in deeper topics.
13 to 17	Pursuing a specific interest, helping plan the day, or visiting with friends. Some teens like special programs or volunteer roles. Ask what is offered.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can share memories, learn alongside children, or take turns leading. Older adults may connect with exhibits from their own lifetimes.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

age or height limits for rides, simulators, or shows, and supervision rules, are set by each museum. Ask before you go.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

ask about seating, step-free routes, and quiet spaces. Some exhibits include loud sounds, dim rooms, or flashing lights.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Learning something new about a favorite topic.
 - Seeing a child get excited about something unexpected.
 - Remembering something from their own past in a history exhibit.
 - Slow time to look, read, and talk.
 - Sharing an interest across generations.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing one thing each to see, so every person gets a turn.
- Asking “What do you notice?” or “What do you think happened here?”
- Comparing what each person found most interesting.
- Finding a connection to something in your own family’s story.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE (ABOUT PLAY IN GENERAL, NOT MUSEUMS)

An American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report on play (Yogman et al., 2018, reaffirmed January 2025) describes play as linked to executive function, social-emotional skills, language, and self-regulation. It states that its animal brain research cannot be directly extrapolated to humans.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes of visits to science, natural history, or history museums. This guide does not state that a visit will improve learning or school performance.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A visit may offer chances to ask questions and explore topics of interest. What a person takes from it depends on the person, the exhibits, and the day.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:

Prices vary. Special exhibits, planetarium shows, or films may cost extra. Ask about memberships, free or discounted days, and library passes. Museums for All is a national program in which participating museums offer reduced admission to visitors who present a SNAP/EBT card. Check museums4all.org for participating museums and current details.

Crowds and noise:

School-group days, weekends, and holidays tend to be busier.

Waiting:

Demonstrations and shows may run at set times. Timed tickets are common at larger museums.

Transportation and parking:

Large museums are often in city centers. Check parking, transit, and drop-off.

Accessibility:

The American Alliance of Museums gives examples of museums offering sensory-friendly events and free American Sign Language-interpreted tours, and it recommends that museums provide an accessibility contact for visitors. Availability varies. Ask about step-free routes, seating, and quiet spaces.

Restrooms and changing:

Ask where they are and whether the museum has family restrooms or a space for feeding.

Food and drink:

Policies vary. Some museums have cafes. Others limit outside food.

Difficult topics:	Some exhibits show specimens, bones, or the history of war, illness, or injustice. Looking at the museum website first can help you decide where to start and how to talk about it.
Time:	You do not need to see everything. A short visit is enough.
Age-related rules:	Ask about age limits for shows or simulators, and whether children must stay with an adult.

Ways to Adapt

Short or split visits:	One gallery at a time.
Quieter times:	Ask about weekday mornings or sensory-friendly events.
Prepare together:	Look at the museum map or website, and pick one thing each person wants to find.
Mixed ages:	Choose a hands-on area for younger children and a topic for older children. Agree on a meeting spot.
Sensory needs:	Bring what helps, such as ear protection or a comfort item. Know where exits and quiet spaces are.
Lower cost:	Ask about reduced-price programs, free days, or library passes. Smaller local history or nature museums may cost less.
At home:	Start a family collection, look up an object that interested a child, or visit a museum's website.

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the main galleries, and which ones suit our family?
- ☐ What does admission include, and are there reduced-price options?
- ☐ Are there hands-on areas, shows, or demonstrations, and when do they run?
- ☐ Is there a quieter time, or a sensory-friendly event?
- ☐ What are the policies on strollers, wheelchairs, and bags?
- ☐ Where are restrooms, changing facilities, and food?
- ☐ Are there exhibits with difficult topics that we want to preview?

Related

Children's museums ([profile 1](#)). Art museums and galleries (profile 3). Heritage sites and historic places ([profile 5](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#).

Sources

American Alliance of Museums. (2022, October 21). *Museum accessibility: An art and a science*. <https://www.aam-us.org/2022/10/21/museum-accessibility-an-art-and-a-science/>

Museums for All. (n.d.). *About Museums for All*. <https://museums4all.org/about/>

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20182058. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/142/3/e20182058/38649/The-Power-of-Play-A-Pediatric-Role-in-Enhancing>

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Art Museums & Galleries

SETTING

Indoor. Some have outdoor sculpture areas.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible. A short visit to one room can be enough.

COST

No cost to higher cost. Some offer free hours or days.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often quieter. Some spaces are hushed, and others host lively family events.

What to Expect

Art museums and galleries display paintings, sculpture, photography, textiles, design, and other works, sometimes from many cultures and time periods. Some focus on one region, period, or type of art. Smaller galleries may show the work of local artists.

Most spaces ask visitors to look and not touch, and many have rules about distance from artwork, bags, and photography. Some offer family programs, art-making areas, or guided tours.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities. Not every museum has each one.

- **Looking closely:** noticing colors, shapes, textures, and details.
- **Imagining:** telling a story about what is happening in a picture.
- **Responding in their own way:** liking, disliking, or feeling something about a work.
- **Seeing different ways of making art:** with paint, clay, fabric, light, or found objects.
- **Making their own:** in a studio space or at home, where offered.
- **Moving through space:** walking around sculpture or following a path through a room.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking at bold colors and shapes. Short visits, often in a carrier or stroller where allowed.
3 to 5	Pointing out favorites, naming colors, and making up stories. Some museums have areas for young children to make art.
6 to 10	Noticing details, playing “I spy” with artworks, sketching, and asking what something means.
11 to 12	Developing their own taste, choosing favorites, and discussing what they notice.
13 to 17	Exploring art as self-expression, looking for styles or artists that interest them, or visiting with friends. Teen programs may be offered. Ask.
Adults and multigenerational	Looking slowly, following an interest, or sharing what a work brings to mind. Seating is available in some galleries.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

rules about touching, distance from artwork, strollers, bags, and supervision are set by each museum. Ask before you go.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

ask about step-free routes, seating in galleries, and quiet spaces.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- A calm place to look and think.
 - Seeing a child’s reaction, which can be surprising.
 - Following their own interests while a child explores.
 - Learning about artists, cultures, or periods.
 - Conversation about what each person notices.
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What Families Might Experience Together

- Each person picking a favorite and saying why.
- Looking at the same work and noticing different things.
- Creating something afterward, such as drawing a favorite piece.
- Learning a little about another culture or time through its art.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	<i>(About play in general)</i> See the AAP report described in the Children's Museums profile. It concerns play, not art museum visits.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from art museum visits. This guide does not state that visiting an art museum will improve creativity, learning, or well-being.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A visit may offer an unhurried way to look, talk, and respond to what people have made. What it offers depends on the person, the art, and the setting.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:	Prices vary. Some offer free hours or days, memberships, and reduced-price programs. Museums for All is a national program in which participating museums offer reduced admission to visitors who present a SNAP/EBT card. Check museums4all.org for participating museums and current details.
Crowds and noise:	Special exhibits and weekends are busier. Some galleries are quiet, and children's voices may stand out. Ask about family-friendly times.
Waiting:	Some special exhibits use timed entry.
Transportation and parking:	Check parking, transit, and drop-off.
Accessibility:	The American Alliance of Museums gives examples of museums offering sensory-friendly events and free American Sign Language-interpreted tours. Availability varies. Ask about step-free routes, benches, wheelchairs on loan, and quiet spaces.
Restrooms and changing:	Ask where they are.
Food and drink:	Usually not allowed in galleries. Some museums have a cafe.
Rules in galleries:	Rules about touching, distance from works, bags, and photography apply to everyone. Explaining them before you go can help.
Time:	A short visit can be enough.

Age-related rules:	Some museums have rules about strollers or about children staying with an adult.
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Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	One room or one special exhibit.
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Prepare together:	Look at images online, and talk about the gallery rules in advance.
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Mixed ages:	Give each child a job, such as finding a favorite color or a work with an animal. Take turns choosing the next stop.
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Sensory needs:	Ask about quiet hours. Know where to take a break.
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Hands-on option:	Ask whether there is a family program, art-making area, or guided tour for families.
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Lower cost:	Ask about free hours, reduced-price programs, or library passes. Community galleries and local artists' open studios may be low or no cost.
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At home:	Look at art books from the library, make art with household materials, or visit a museum's website.
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Before You Go

- ☐ What kinds of art are shown?
 - ☐ What does admission include, and are there free hours or reduced-price options?
 - ☐ Are there family programs, an art-making space, or guided tours?
 - ☐ What are the rules about touching, strollers, bags, and photography?
 - ☐ Are there quiet times, benches, and step-free routes?
 - ☐ Where are restrooms and changing facilities?
 - ☐ Is there a cafe or a place to eat?
-

Related

Science, natural history and history museums ([profile 2](#)). Making art and music ([profile 20](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#).

Sources

American Alliance of Museums. (2022, October 21). *Museum accessibility: An art and a science*.

<https://www.aam-us.org/2022/10/21/museum-accessibility-an-art-and-a-science/>

Museums for All. (n.d.). *About Museums for All*. <https://museums4all.org/about/>

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), e20182058.

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

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Libraries

SETTING

Indoor. Some have outdoor spaces.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible, from a quick book pickup to an afternoon.

COST

Often no cost to use. Fees may apply for some services, such as printing or late returns. Ask your library.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often quieter. Children's areas and programs can be lively.

What to Expect

A public library offers books, magazines, music, films, and digital resources, along with computers, quiet places to read or work, and programs. Programs vary by library. Common examples are storytimes, game nights, digital workshops, and makerspaces. Ask your library what it offers. For more information, see the American Library Association website ([link in Sources](#)).

What a library offers differs by location. A small branch may have a few shelves and a weekly storytime. A larger library may have separate areas for children and teens, meeting rooms, and a full calendar of events. You usually need a library card to borrow, and requirements vary by library.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities. Not every library has each one.

- **Choosing their own books:** following an interest, or trying something new.
- **Listening and joining in:** at storytime, with songs, rhymes, and movement.
- **Making and building:** at a makerspace or craft program, where offered.
- **Quiet time:** reading or looking at books at their own pace.
- **Games and puzzles:** in a program or at a table.
- **Digital resources:** with an adult, where offered.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking at books together, songs, and rhymes at a storytime or lap-sit program, where offered. Sturdy books are easy for small hands.
3 to 5	Storytime, picking favorites, repeating books, and craft activities.
6 to 10	Choosing their own books, series, or topics. Programs, clubs, and borrowing their own card.
11 to 12	More independence in choosing books and topics. Clubs, games, or time with friends in the library.
13 to 17	Study space, books and media, programs for teens, volunteering, or meeting friends. Ask what the library offers.
Adults and multigenerational	Borrowing, browsing, using computers, attending programs, or sitting quietly. Grandparents might read with grandchildren.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

age requirements for library cards, borrowing, and unaccompanied visits vary by library. Ask.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

ask about step-free access, seating, accessible formats, and quiet spaces.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Browsing, borrowing, and finding something new to read.
 - Programs for adults, such as book clubs or workshops, where offered.
 - A quiet place to sit or work.
 - Time with a child choosing books.
 - Meeting others in the community.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Each person choosing a book for the family to share.
- Reading aloud, taking turns, or listening to an audiobook.
- Attending a program together, such as a storytime or game night.
- Making the library a regular stop.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	(<i>Guidance</i>) The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents and caregivers to read aloud with newborns and young children, beginning at birth and continuing at least through kindergarten. The AAP describes shared reading as helping to build a foundation for social-emotional, cognitive, language, and literacy development (HealthyChildren.org, September 29, 2024).
LIMITS	The AAP page I reviewed is a summary of the organization’s policy. I did not review the underlying research, and the page does not discuss limits of the evidence.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	Reading together does not guarantee school success. The sources I reviewed do not evaluate library visits.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A library can be a regular, low-cost place for families to find books and activities. What a family gets from it depends on the library, the programs, and the family’s interests.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Using a library is often free. Ask your library about any fees, such as printing or late returns.
Library cards:	Requirements, such as proof of address or a parent’s permission for children, vary. Ask the library.
Hours:	Branch hours vary and may be limited on evenings, weekends, or holidays. Check before you go.
Crowds and noise:	After-school hours and popular programs can be busy. Children’s areas are often livelier.
Programs:	Some programs need registration or have a limited number of spots.
Transportation and parking:	A nearby branch may be walkable. Check parking and transit for larger libraries.
Accessibility:	Ask about step-free entry, seating, quiet spaces, and whether the library has large print, audiobooks, or other formats. Availability varies.

Restrooms and changing:	Ask where they are.
Food and drink:	Policies vary.
Time:	A short visit works well.
Borrowing rules:	Ask about how many items you can borrow, loan periods, and how to renew.

Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	Pick up reserved books and leave, or stay a few minutes.
Quieter times:	Ask which hours are calmest.
Mixed ages:	Visit the children's area first, then let older children choose on their own.
Sensory needs:	Look for a quiet corner. Ask about sensory-friendly programs.
Reading differences:	Ask about audiobooks, large print, picture-based books, or other formats.
Limited transportation:	Ask whether the library offers delivery, outreach, or digital borrowing. Availability varies.
Lower cost:	Libraries can often be a main source of no-cost books and activities.
At home:	Set up a reading corner, borrow a book on a topic from a recent outing, or play an audiobook.

Before You Go

- ☐ What do I need to get a library card, and do children need an adult to sign?
- ☐ What are the hours?
- ☐ What programs are offered for our family's ages, and do they need registration?
- ☐ How many items can we borrow, and for how long?
- ☐ Does the library offer accessible formats or digital borrowing?
- ☐ Are there passes or special programs we can borrow or join?
- ☐ Are there quiet spaces?

Related

Heritage sites and historic places ([profile 5](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 03.

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024, September 29). *Beyond literacy: Shared reading starting at birth offers lifelong benefits*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/beyond-literacy-shared-reading-starting-in-infancy-offers-lifelong-benefits.aspx>

American Library Association. (n.d.). *American Library Association* [Home page]. <https://www.ala.org>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Heritage Sites & Historic Places

SETTING

Indoor, outdoor, or both.

TYPICAL TIME

Varies, from a short stop to most of a day.

COST

No cost to higher cost. Some sites charge admission. Others do not.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Open sites can be quiet. Tours and events can be busy.

What to Expect

Heritage sites and historic places are preserved because of their connection to history or culture. They can include historic homes and neighborhoods, battlefields, memorials, forts, cultural centers, and landmarks. Many are run by federal, state, local, tribal, or private organizations, and some are part of the National Park Service.

Visits might include walking the grounds, touring a building, watching a film, reading exhibits, or joining a talk or tour. Some sites offer programs for children, such as activity booklets or costumed demonstrations.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities. Not every site has each one.

- **Stories of people:** learning who lived, worked, or gathered at a place.
- **Standing where something happened:** walking the ground, seeing the rooms, or looking at a view.
- **Objects and tools:** looking at what people used, wore, or built.
- **Activities made for children:** such as a Junior Ranger booklet or a scavenger hunt, where offered.
- **Moving outdoors:** walking, climbing steps, and exploring grounds.
- **Asking questions:** about how life was different and what has stayed the same.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Being outdoors, looking at buildings and objects, and short walks. Strollers may or may not fit historic spaces.
3 to 5	Short visits, exploring grounds, and looking at objects. A child-friendly program may help.
6 to 10	Activity booklets or badge programs, finding clues, and asking questions.
11 to 12	More reading and discussion, following a topic, and more interest in hard questions about the past.
13 to 17	Digging into a topic, joining tours or programs, talking about how the past connects to today, or volunteering. Ask what is offered.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults may have memories, family connections, or a personal interest in a site. Older adults may share what they know.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

tour age limits, supervision, and rules about touching and photography are set by each site. Ask.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

historic buildings can have stairs, narrow doors, uneven floors, and outdoor terrain. Ask about step-free routes and rest areas.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Connecting with a place that matters to them or their family.
 - Learning about local or national history.
 - Walking, looking, and slow time outdoors.
 - Sharing stories with children or grandchildren.
 - Conversation about how the past connects to the present.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Following a program or booklet together.
- Asking “What do you think it was like here?”
- Talking about family history in connection with a place.
- Visiting a place that matters to a community.

Evidence Notes

PROGRAM INFORMATION	(<i>Not research</i>) The National Park Service describes Junior Ranger programs as connecting “kids and their families to the people, places, and stories of the National Park Service,” says “Everyone is welcome, regardless of ability,” and notes that most parks have programs. Activities are often presented in a free activity booklet, and the site gives no age range. The page does not say whether every program is free (page updated December 18, 2025).
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting heritage sites. This guide does not state that a visit will improve learning, understanding, or family relationships.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A visit may offer a way to connect with stories, places, and people. What a person takes from it depends on the person, the site, and the day.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:	Some sites charge admission and others do not. Ask about discounts. Every Kid Outdoors, a federal program, offers fourth graders and their families free access to hundreds of parks, lands, and waters for a year, but not every site accepts the pass. Check everykidoutdoors.gov for current details and call ahead.
Crowds and noise:	Peak seasons, holidays, and event days are busier.
Waiting:	Tours may run at set times and have limited space.
Transportation and parking:	Some sites are in rural or remote areas. Check distance, parking, and whether public transit serves the site.
Accessibility:	The National Park Service says park websites offer information about accessible features, programs, and services, and its accessibility page has a “Find a Park” map. Other sites may offer similar information. Ask about step-free entry, rest areas, and tour options.
Terrain and weather:	Many sites include walking outdoors. Check the forecast, shade, and surfaces.
Restrooms and changing:	Ask about where they are, especially at sites with limited facilities.

Food and drink:	Bring water. Policies on food vary.
Difficult history:	Some sites tell hard stories, such as war, enslavement, displacement, or loss. Families can read about the site first and decide how to approach hard topics.
Time:	A visit does not need to cover everything.
Age-related rules:	Ask about tour age limits and supervision rules.

Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	Start with a visitor center or one part of the site.
Prepare together:	Read about the site, and decide what to look for.
Mixed ages:	Pair a child-friendly program for younger children with a tour or talk for older ones.
Sensory needs:	Look for quieter times and outdoor spaces for breaks.
Mobility:	Ask which areas are step-free, where seating is, and whether transportation or mobility devices are available.
Hard topics:	Preview, pause, and talk afterward. Let children ask questions.
Lower cost:	Check for free days, a no-cost site nearby, or programs such as Every Kid Outdoors.
At home:	Read a story set in another time, look at old photographs, or ask older relatives about a place that mattered to them.

Before You Go

- ☐ What is there to see, and how long do families usually stay?
- ☐ What does admission include, and are there reduced-price or free options?
- ☐ Are there programs for children, such as an activity booklet?
- ☐ What are the accessible routes and facilities?
- ☐ Is any of the history difficult, and how does the site present it?
- ☐ Are tours at set times, or can we explore on our own?
- ☐ What are the weather, terrain, and parking like?

Related

Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Science, natural history and history museums ([profile 2](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Every Kid Outdoors. (n.d.). *Every Kid Outdoors*. <https://everykidoutdoors.gov/>

National Park Service. (2025, December 18). *Become a Junior Ranger*. <https://www.nps.gov/kids/become-a-junior-ranger.htm>

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B

CATEGORY 2 OF 7

Outdoors, Nature & Animals

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Parks and Playgrounds

SETTING

Outdoor.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible, from a short stop to most of a day.

COST

Often no cost. Some parks charge for parking, entry, or shelter rental.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. A busy playground can be loud, and a quiet corner of a park can be calm.

What to Expect

Public parks differ widely. A neighborhood park might have a small playground and a bench. A larger park might have open fields, trails, picnic areas, sports courts, shelters, and water features. Some playgrounds have one play structure. Others have several areas.

Weather, season, and time of day change the experience. Shade, heat, mud, and closed water features all depend on the day. Some parks offer organized programs, and others are simply open space.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Moving:** climbing, swinging, sliding, balancing, running.
- **Open-ended play:** inventing games, building with sticks or sand, pretending.
- **The natural world:** grass, trees, insects, puddles, leaves, and seasons, where the park has them.
- **Being with others:** meeting other children, taking turns, sharing space.
- **Taking on small challenges:** trying a taller slide or a new way to cross a structure.

Across Ages

0 to 2	Exploring surfaces, sand, and grass. Ground-level play and supported swinging. Close adult presence.
3 to 5	Climbing, sliding, pretend play, and repeating a favorite activity.
6 to 10	Bigger structures, games with other children, bikes or scooters where allowed.
11 to 12	Group games, sports courts, hanging out with friends, or helping a younger sibling.
13 to 17	Walking and talking, courts and fields, fitness areas where available, or meeting up with friends.
Adults and multigenerational	Walking, sitting and talking, watching, or joining a game. Benches, shade, and level paths matter for many adults.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission handbook describes separate play areas by age group (ages 6 months to 23 months, 2 to 5 years, and 5 to 12 years). These are equipment design categories, not rules about who may enjoy a park. Posted signs may list age or use limits.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

equipment should match a child's age and ability, per the American Academy of Pediatrics. Look at surfaces, shade, and how close an adult needs to be.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Time outdoors without a set plan.
- Watching a child take on something new.
- Walking the park, sitting, or talking with other caregivers.
- Joining in: pushing a swing, kicking a ball, walking a trail.
- Resting while children play, where the setting is safe and supervision is possible.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Playing a game that grows, with rules that change as it goes.
- Walking or exploring a part of the park no one has seen before.
- Sharing a snack or a picnic (see profile 11).
- A familiar place that a family returns to, with different things to notice each season.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that children and adolescents ages 6 to 17 get 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day (page last reviewed July 3, 2024). A park is one place where activity can happen. This guide does not state that a park visit meets the recommendation.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(About play in general) The American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report on play (Yogman et al., 2018) describes play as linked to executive function, social-emotional skills, language, and self-regulation. Its limits are described in the Children's Museums profile and the source log.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A 2015 literature review (Chawla) links contact with nature to outcomes in areas including physical health, cognitive functioning and self-control, psychological well-being, and imaginative play. The review draws on many kinds of studies, including correlational ones. A park with a lot of green space may offer more nature contact than a paved play area. What a child or family experiences depends on the setting and the day.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

A visit to a park does not guarantee better health, learning, mood, or family relationships.

Safety Note

- **Supervision:** The American Academy of Pediatrics states that “even on safe, age-appropriate playgrounds, adult guidance and supervision is the best way to prevent injuries.” The CPSC handbook notes that toddlers and preschool-age children need more attentive supervision than older children, and that one should not rely on supervision alone to prevent injuries.
- **Surfaces:** The American Academy of Pediatrics advises steering clear of hard surfaces such as concrete or asphalt, and notes that grass is not a shock-absorbing surface. The CPSC handbook says elevated playground equipment should never be installed without protective surfacing, and that loose-fill surfacing should be avoided for playgrounds intended for toddlers.
- **Hot equipment:** The American Academy of Pediatrics cautions that metal slides can get very hot from the sun and seriously burn a child’s hands and legs. Plastic slides can also get hot. Look for shade on sunny days.
- **Winter play:** The American Academy of Pediatrics advises several thin layers, insulated boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat, changing wet clothing right away, and setting limits on time outside with a place to warm up. It says playing outside in temperatures or wind chills below -15°F should generally be avoided. For sledding, it advises that children under 12 always be supervised and that steerable sleds are better than snow disks or inner tubes. For more information, see the CDC page on preventing hypothermia ([link in Sources](#)).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Most public parks have no admission fee. Some charge for parking, events, or shelter rental.
Crowds and noise:	Weekends, evenings, and holidays tend to be busier.
Waiting:	Popular swings or slides may mean taking turns.
Transportation and parking:	Some parks are walkable, and others need a car. Check parking, bus routes, and sidewalks. A closer, smaller park can work well for families with limited transportation.
Accessibility:	The U.S. Access Board explains that ADA standards for play areas apply to newly built or altered play areas for children ages 2 and older. They include accessible routes and surfaces that wheelchairs can use. A playground built before the standards, and not altered since, may not have these features. Surface type matters for wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers. Look at photos, call the parks department, or visit once without children to check.

Restrooms and changing:	Not every park has restrooms, and some close seasonally. Ask or look at the park website.
Food and drink:	Bring water. Rules on grilling, alcohol, and outside food vary by park.
Time:	A short visit can be enough. Weather and light can shorten or lengthen it.
Age-related rules:	Posted signs may list age ranges for equipment or limits on use of courts, fields, and shelters.

Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	Stop for 20 minutes on the way somewhere else.
Quieter times:	Early morning or weekday afternoons are often calmer.
Shade and seating:	Pick a park with shade, or bring a folding chair or blanket.
Fenced or enclosed areas:	Helpful for families with children who run or wander.
Sensory needs:	Visit once at a quiet time so the space becomes familiar. Bring what helps.
Mobility:	Look for firm, level paths and seating. Ask about accessible routes and surfaces.
Mixed ages:	Choose a park with several play areas or an open field.
Rural settings:	A field, a school yard where public use is allowed, or a trailhead may work as a park.
Winter:	Many parks are open in winter. Check which areas are cleared or closed, and dress in layers.
Lower cost:	Parks are often already low-cost. Pack a snack to avoid buying food there.

Before You Go

- ☐ Is there shade, and where does it fall during the hours we plan to visit?
 - ☐ What are the playground surfaces like?
 - ☐ Are there separate areas for younger and older children?
 - ☐ Are there restrooms, water fountains, and seating, and are they open this season?
 - ☐ Is the park fenced?
 - ☐ What do I need to know about parking or bus access?
 - ☐ Are there accessible paths and entrances?
 - ☐ Are there posted rules about hours, equipment, or dogs?
-

Related

[Parent Guide 09](#) (Planning Affordable Family Adventures). Nature trails and walks ([profile 7](#)). Picnics ([profile 11](#)). Biking (profile 23).

Sources

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026, January 27). *Playing outside in winter: Tips to keep kids warm & safe*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Winter-Safety.aspx>
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-

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Nature Trails & Walks

SETTING

Outdoor.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible, from a short loop to a full day.

COST

Often no cost. Some trails charge for parking or entry.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often quiet. Weather, crowds, and terrain vary.

What to Expect

Trails range from paved paths and boardwalks to dirt, gravel, roots, and rocks. Some are short loops. Others are long routes that take hours. They may be in city parks, state parks, forests, shorelines, or along rivers and rail corridors.

Trail signs and maps usually give distance and difficulty, though how those are described varies. Some trails work for strollers or wheelchairs. Others do not. Weather, season, and light change what a trail is like.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Noticing:** plants, insects, birds, tracks, sounds, smells, and textures.
- **Moving in different ways:** stepping over roots, crossing stones, climbing, balancing on logs.
- **Setting their own pace:** stopping to look, running ahead, or turning back.
- **Finding things:** leaves, rocks, feathers, or a view.
- **Challenges:** reaching a lookout, finishing a loop, or finding the way with a map.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Riding in a carrier or stroller where the path allows, or toddling short stretches. Stops to look and touch.
3 to 5	Short loops with many stops. Collecting leaves and rocks, and walking at their own speed.
6 to 10	Longer walks, trail games, and reading signs or maps.
11 to 12	Taking part in route choices, and keeping up a steady pace.
13 to 17	Hiking with family or friends, navigating, taking photographs, or taking on longer routes.
Adults and multigenerational	A slower pace, benches, level ground, and time to talk. Different generations can share the same trail at different speeds.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
some trails limit bicycles, dogs, or other uses. Rules are set by the land manager. Ask or check the trail website.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
trail surface, width, slope, ticks, heat, and water can all matter.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Time outdoors with no set agenda.
 - Conversation while walking.
 - Noticing something new in a familiar place.
 - Moving at a comfortable pace.
 - Time to think, or to watch children explore.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing a trail together or taking turns picking the next turn.
- Finding the first sign of a season, such as buds, leaves, or snow.
- Setting a small goal, such as a lookout or a bridge.
- Walking the same trail in different seasons.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(*Guidance*) The CDC recommends 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for ages 6 to 17. A walk is one way activity can happen. This guide does not state that a trail walk meets the recommendation.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A 2015 literature review (Chawla) links contact with nature to outcomes in areas including physical health, cognitive functioning and self-control, psychological well-being, and imaginative play. The review draws on many kinds of studies, including correlational ones. What a family experiences depends on the trail, the weather, and the day.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

A trail walk does not guarantee better health, mood, or family relationships.

Safety Note: Ticks

- Ticks are most active from April to September, but exposure can occur year-round (CDC). Walking in the center of trails, using EPA-registered insect repellent, and checking everyone for ticks after being outdoors can reduce risk. Tick risk varies by region.
- For more information, including repellent guidance for young children, see the CDC page on preventing tick bites (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Many trails are free. Some charge for parking, entry, or permits.
Crowds and noise:	Popular trails are busier on weekends and in good weather.
Waiting:	Not usually an issue, though parking at popular trailheads can fill up.
Transportation and parking:	Many trailheads need a car. Some city greenways connect to neighborhoods or transit.
Accessibility:	The U.S. Access Board has standards for trails and trailheads at federal facilities. For state, local, and private trails they serve as guidance, so features vary. Look at the trail description for surface, width, and slope, or contact the land manager. The National Park Service says park websites offer information about accessible features.
Restrooms and changing:	Many trailheads have none. Ask or plan ahead.

Food and drink:	Bring water and snacks. Pack out your trash.
Time:	Allow extra time for stops and for daylight. A short walk is enough.
Weather:	Heat, cold, rain, mud, and ice change how a trail feels.
Telling someone your plan:	A simple habit on longer routes.
Age-related rules:	Rare on trails, but ask about rules for bikes, dogs, and group size.

Ways to Adapt

Short or paved routes:	A boardwalk or paved path may suit strollers, wheelchairs, and short legs.
Quieter times:	Early mornings and weekdays are often calmer.
Mixed ages:	Walk at the pace of the slowest person. Offer older children a leading role.
Sensory needs:	Choose a shaded, quiet trail. Bring what helps, and plan breaks.
Mobility:	Look for firm, level surfaces, benches, and routes that loop back.
Limited transportation:	Look for a greenway or park path near home.
Rural settings:	A field edge, a quiet road, or a creek path may serve the same purpose.
Lower cost:	Many trails cost nothing. A walk around your own neighborhood counts too.
At home:	A nature walk around the block, a leaf collection, or a bird list.

Before You Go

- ☐ How long is the trail, and what is the surface like?
 - ☐ Are there steep sections, stairs, or water crossings?
 - ☐ Are bikes, dogs, or other uses allowed?
 - ☐ Are there restrooms, water, and shade?
 - ☐ What is the parking or transit situation?
 - ☐ What are the weather and light hours?
 - ☐ Are ticks, insects, or other hazards common here?
 - ☐ Is there a loop, or do we need to turn around?
-

Related

Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Beaches, lakes and rivers (profile 8). Biking ([profile 23](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#).

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, August 28). *Preventing tick bites*. <https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/prevention/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 3). *Physical activity guidelines for school-aged children and adolescents*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/>
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-

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Beaches, Lakes & Rivers

SETTING

Outdoor, in or near water.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible, from an hour to a full day.

COST

No cost to higher cost.
Some charge for parking, entry, or rentals.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Water, sun, wind, and crowds can be intense. Quiet spots may be available.

What to Expect

Beaches, lakes, and rivers can be swimming areas, places to walk along the shore, or places to fish, paddle, or boat. Some have lifeguards, bathhouses, and marked swimming areas. Others are natural and have none of these.

Conditions change with weather, season, tides, and water level. Some areas have posted warnings, such as for strong currents or water quality.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Water and sand:** splashing, digging, building, floating, and filling buckets.
- **Shoreline discoveries:** shells, rocks, driftwood, and small creatures.
- **Movement:** wading, swimming where it is safe, and running along the shore.
- **Sensory play:** sand, waves, wind, sun, and water temperature.
- **Fishing or paddling:** watching, waiting, casting, or riding in a boat with a life jacket.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Sitting in shallow water or sand with an adult within arm's reach. Short visits and shade.
3 to 5	Playing at the water's edge, building, and collecting. Always close adult supervision.
6 to 10	Wading, swimming with swimming skills and supervision, fishing, and exploring the shore.
11 to 12	Swimming, paddling, or fishing with more independence, still with adult watching.
13 to 17	Water sports, fishing, boating, or time with friends. Teens benefit from knowing the rules and risks too.
Adults and multigenerational	Walking the shore, fishing, sitting in the shade, or watching. A chair, shade, and level ground matter for many adults.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
swimming areas, boat rentals, and fishing spots have rules that vary. Some require life jackets, an adult in the water, or a license.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
water depth, currents, water quality, heat, and sun are the main factors.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Sitting by the water and watching children play.
 - Swimming, paddling, fishing, or walking.
 - A change of scenery.
 - Passing along an activity they enjoyed as a child.
 - Time without screens, where the setting allows.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Building something in the sand together.
- Fishing side by side, with time to wait and talk.
- Watching for something, such as a bird or a boat.
- A shared memory of a place and a season.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The American Academy of Pediatrics advises families to designate a water watcher, to stay within arm's reach of young children, and to use life jackets for small children and those without strong swimming skills in or near water (HealthyChildren.org, June 25, 2026). The CDC says swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning (January 27, 2026).

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The CDC says germs in pools and lakes can make people sick, and children are at higher risk (June 6, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

A visit to the water does not guarantee health or relationship outcomes. Safety guidance reduces risk and does not remove it.

Safety Note

- **Supervision:** The CDC says an adult should always be within arm's length of a child in or near water, even when a lifeguard is present. The AAP advises designating a water watcher.
- **Life jackets:** The CDC says children and adults are best protected by wearing U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets in or around open water. The AAP says small children and those without strong swimming skills should wear a life jacket in or near the water.
- **Conditions:** Choose lifeguarded areas where possible. Look for swim warnings or closures, and avoid unusually cloudy water (CDC).
- For more information, see the CDC pages on summer swim safety and on preventing swimming-related illnesses (links in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Public beaches and lakes may be free, or may charge for parking or entry. Boat, kayak, and gear rentals cost extra.
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Crowds and noise:	Summer weekends and holidays tend to be the busiest.
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Waiting:	Parking and rentals may involve lines at popular spots.
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Transportation and parking:	Many sites need a car. Check parking, shuttle options, and distance from the car to the water.
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Accessibility:	Standards for beach access routes apply to federal facilities and serve as guidance elsewhere (U.S. Access Board). Ask whether there is a firm path to the water, accessible restrooms, and seating.
Restrooms and changing:	Not all sites have them. Ask about changing areas.
Food and drink:	Bring water and shade. Policies vary on food, grills, and alcohol.
Fishing licenses:	Rules vary by state. Check your state wildlife or natural resources agency. For more information, see the Take Me Fishing website (link in Sources).
Sun and heat:	Plan for shade, sun protection, and water. Sun, heat, and fatigue can build quickly, so a shorter visit is fine.
Age-related rules:	Some beaches and rentals set age minimums or require an adult.

Ways to Adapt

Shallow and shaded options:	Choose a calm, shallow area with shade.
Short visits:	An hour can be enough.
Quieter times:	Early morning or late afternoon on weekdays.
Swimming skills:	Use life jackets, and consider lessons. Swim lessons are widely available through community pools and recreation centers.
Sensory needs:	Look for shade and a quiet spot. Bring what helps, such as a hat or ear protection.
Mobility:	Ask about firm paths to the water and seating. Choose a spot near the car.
Mixed ages:	Set up a base with shade. Take turns watching.
Limited transportation:	A local lake or river path may serve the same purpose.
Lower cost:	Public shoreline access may be free. Borrow gear or fish from the bank.
At home:	Play in a sprinkler, or make a shoreline in a tub with shells and rocks.

Before You Go

- ☐ Is there a lifeguard, and what are the posted warnings?
 - ☐ Are there water-quality advisories or closures?
 - ☐ What are the water depth and current like?
 - ☐ Does each child have a life jacket that fits?
 - ☐ Is there shade, water, and a restroom?
 - ☐ What do I need for fishing, such as a license?
 - ☐ What are the parking and distance to the water?
 - ☐ Who will be the water watcher, and when do we switch?
-

Related

Swimming, pools and splash pads ([profile 21](#)). Nature trails and walks ([profile 7](#)). Water parks ([profile 14](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026, June 25). *Beach safety for families: How to keep kids safe in the sun, sand & surf*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/beach-safety-for-families-safe-fun-in-the-sun-sand-and-sea.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026, January 27). *Summer swim safety*. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/prevention/summer-swim-safety.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, June 6). *Preventing swimming-related illnesses*. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-swimming/prevention/>
- Take Me Fishing. (n.d.). *Take Me Fishing* [Home page]. <https://www.takemefishing.org/>
- U.S. Access Board. (n.d.). *Chapter 10: Outdoor developed areas*. <https://www.access-board.gov/aba/guides/chapter-10-outdoor/>
-

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Gardens (Botanical and Community)

SETTING

Mostly outdoor. Botanical gardens may include greenhouses or conservatories.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible. A botanical garden visit may take an hour or two. Community gardens may involve regular visits across a season.

COST

No cost to higher cost. Botanical gardens often charge admission. Many community gardens are free to visit, and some charge a membership or plot fee.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often quiet and calm, with strong smells and textures in some areas.

What to Expect

Botanical gardens display plants in designed settings, often with themed areas, greenhouses, walking paths, seasonal displays, and programs. **Community gardens** are shared growing spaces where neighbors plant, tend, and harvest, sometimes in individual plots and sometimes together. The American Community Gardening Association describes community gardens as shared community spaces that bring people together.

Visitors to a botanical garden usually look and do not pick. Community gardens work differently. Some welcome visitors and volunteers, and others are for members only. Ask.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Plants through the senses:** colors, shapes, smells, and textures, where touching is allowed.
- **Growing:** planting a seed, watering, watching change over days or weeks.
- **Visitors in the garden:** bees, butterflies, worms, and birds.
- **Food:** where vegetables, herbs, and fruit come from, and tasting what has been grown, where the garden permits.
- **Taking part:** helping with simple jobs such as watering or weeding.
- **Seasons:** noticing what changes from month to month.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking, smelling, and touching leaves or soil where allowed. Close adult supervision, because small children put things in their mouths.
3 to 5	Watering, digging, and looking for bugs. Repeating the same garden visit.
6 to 10	Planting, tending a small plot, and learning plant names.
11 to 12	Taking charge of a task or plot. Interest in growing food or flowers.
13 to 17	Volunteering, growing food for the household or a community, photography, or garden design.
Adults and multigenerational	Gardening knowledge passed between generations. Garden paths and benches can suit slower walks.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

botanical gardens may have rules on strollers, picking, and supervision. Community gardens may require membership, a waiver, or an adult.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

paths, steps, sun, and what plants are safe to touch or taste matter.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- A calm place to walk or sit.
 - Learning about plants, growing food, or garden design.
 - Meeting neighbors in a community garden.
 - Working with their hands.
 - Passing on or learning gardening skills.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Planting something together and watching it grow.
- Walking a garden and choosing favorite plants.
- Sharing what you grow with others.
- Learning something new about food or plants.

Evidence Notes

WHAT THIS GUIDE RELIES ON	The American Community Gardening Association's description of community gardens is the association's own description of its field. It is not research.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	<i>(Nature contact)</i> A 2015 literature review (Chawla) links contact with nature to outcomes in areas including physical health, cognitive functioning and self-control, psychological well-being, and imaginative play. The review draws on many kinds of studies. The overview I reviewed does not say how much of this applies to gardens in particular.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting botanical gardens or taking part in community gardens. This guide does not state that gardening will improve health, learning, or family relationships.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:	Botanical gardens often charge admission, and some offer free days or reduced-price programs. Ask.
Crowds and noise:	Special events and peak bloom times tend to be busier.
Seasons:	Many gardens change a lot by season. Some areas or greenhouses may be closed at times.
Transportation and parking:	Botanical gardens are often in cities. Community gardens are often within neighborhoods.
Accessibility:	Ask about paved paths, benches, steps, and wheelchair or stroller access. Community garden beds may be raised or at ground level, so ask what is available.
Restrooms and changing:	Not every community garden has restrooms. Botanical gardens usually do. Ask.
Food and drink:	Policies vary. Many gardens limit food to certain areas.
Plants and safety:	Some plants can cause illness if eaten or irritation if touched. Ask garden staff or organizers which plants children should not touch or taste. Allergies to pollen or bee stings can matter.

Sun, heat, and insects:	Plan for shade, water, and repellent as needed. See the tick note in the Nature Trails profile.
Community garden commitment:	Some plots require regular tending. Ask about expectations before you join.
Age-related rules:	Ask about supervision rules for children.

Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	One section of a botanical garden, or one task in a community garden.
Quieter times:	Weekday mornings.
Mixed ages:	Give each child a job, such as counting flowers or watering.
Sensory needs:	Gardens can be quiet, but strong smells or buzzing insects may bother some. Look for a calm area.
Mobility:	Ask about raised beds, wide paths, and seating.
Limited space:	A pot on a windowsill, a bucket, or a few seeds in a cup can grow something.
Lower cost:	Many community gardens welcome volunteers. Look for free days at botanical gardens.
At home:	Grow herbs in a window, regrow kitchen scraps in water, or look at a plant each week.

Before You Go

- ☐ Is there admission, and are there free days or reduced-price options?
- ☐ What can children touch, pick, or taste, and what should they avoid?
- ☐ Are paths and entrances accessible, and is there seating?
- ☐ Are there restrooms, shade, and water?
- ☐ For a community garden, do visitors need to join, sign a waiver, or be supervised?
- ☐ What are the stroller, picnic, and photography rules?
- ☐ What does the garden look like in this season?

Related

Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Nature trails and walks (profile 7). Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). Volunteering together ([profile 33](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#).

Sources

American Community Gardening Association. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://www.communitygarden.org/about>

Chawla, L. (2015). Benefits of nature contact for children. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 30(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412215595441>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Camping

SETTING

Outdoor, overnight or longer.

TYPICAL TIME

One night to several.
Many families start with a single night.

COST

No cost to higher cost.
Campsite fees vary. Gear can be borrowed, rented, or bought.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often quiet in the daytime. Night noise, light, temperature, and sleeping on the ground can be a lot for some people.

What to Expect

Camping can mean a tent in a developed campground with restrooms and water, a camper or cabin, or a remote site with no facilities. Some sites have fire rings, picnic tables, and showers. Others have none.

Camp days often center on setup, cooking, walking, and resting. The experience depends on the site, the season, and the weather. A backyard campout is camping, too.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Being outdoors for longer:** morning, evening, and night in the same place.
- **Helping with setup:** putting up a tent, rolling a sleeping bag, or gathering supplies.
- **Cooking and eating outside:** with adult help and supervision.
- **Nature at night:** stars, sounds, and the dark.
- **Free play:** making up games with sticks, rocks, and other campers.
- **Routines in a new setting:** sleeping somewhere different.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Camping can be hard with a baby or toddler because of sleep, temperature, and safety. Some families choose cabins, short trips, or a backyard trial first.
3 to 5	Short stays, familiar sleep items, and close supervision near fires and water.
6 to 10	Helping with chores, exploring nearby, and sleeping in a tent.
11 to 12	Taking on tasks such as setting up or cooking, and exploring with more independence nearby.
13 to 17	Leading setup, planning meals or routes, and taking on a longer trip.
Adults and multigenerational	Chairs, a firm sleeping surface, and quiet time matter to many adults. Cabins can work for older relatives.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
campgrounds set rules on quiet hours, fires, pets, visitors, and the number of people per site. Some require an adult to be at the site with minors.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
weather, fire, food storage, water, carbon monoxide, and ticks are the main concerns.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Time away from daily routines.
 - Cooking and eating outdoors.
 - Sitting by a fire where permitted.
 - Quiet, stars, and unhurried time.
 - Passing on or learning outdoor skills.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Setting up camp as a team.
- Cooking and eating together.
- Telling stories, singing, or playing games.
- Coping with a challenge, such as rain, and getting through it.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE (GUIDANCE, NOT ABOUT CAMPING OUTCOMES)

See the safety notes below, from the CDC and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from camping. This guide does not state that camping will improve health, mood, or family bonds.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Camping may offer extended time outdoors and a break from routine. How a family experiences it depends on the site, the weather, and the people.

Safety Note

- **Food:** The CDC says never to leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if it is above 90°F.
- **Carbon monoxide:** The Consumer Product Safety Commission says people die every year from carbon monoxide poisoning from portable camping heaters, lanterns, or stoves used inside tents, campers, and vehicles, and advises against using them while sleeping in enclosed spaces.
- **Campfires:** Campfire rules vary by park and conditions. Check with the park for burn bans and local rules. For more information, see the National Park Service website (link in Sources).
- **Ticks:** See the tick note in the Nature Trails profile.
- For more information on food safety, see the CDC page on preventing food poisoning (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Campsite fees vary by type of site and season. Gear can be borrowed, rented, or bought. Some campgrounds rent cabins or equipment. Ask.
Reservations:	Many campgrounds need reservations, especially in summer. Ask about cancellation policies.
Crowds and noise:	Peak season and holiday weekends are busy. Campgrounds often have quiet hours.
Waiting:	Check-in lines and shared facilities can involve waiting.

Transportation and parking:	Most campgrounds require a car. Check distance, road conditions, and where to park.
Accessibility:	The U.S. Access Board standards for federal facilities include camping units with mobility features. For other campgrounds, they serve as guidance. Ask for an accessible site, accessible restrooms, and step-free routes to facilities.
Restrooms and changing:	Some campgrounds have showers and flush toilets. Others have pit toilets or none.
Food and water:	Plan for safe storage, cooking, and clean water. Follow campground rules on food storage.
Time:	A first trip can be one night. Packing, setting up, and breaking camp take time.
Weather and sleep:	Cold, heat, rain, and noise can affect sleep. Test gear at home.
Age-related rules:	Some campgrounds have rules about minors and supervision.

Ways to Adapt

Try it close to home:	A backyard campout or a campground near home.
Short trips:	One night, in good weather.
Cabins or rentals:	A way to try camping without tents or sleeping on the ground.
Mixed ages:	Plan quiet time for younger children, and offer older children bigger jobs.
Sensory needs:	Bring familiar sleep items, ear protection, and a plan for a hard night.
Mobility:	Ask for an accessible site, a cot or raised bed, and seating.
Limited transportation:	A site close to home, or a walk-in site near a transit stop where available.
Lower cost:	Borrow gear, camp at a no-cost or low-cost site, or try a backyard campout.
At home:	A tent in the living room, flashlight stories, and a picnic dinner.

Before You Go

- ☐ What type of campground is it, and what facilities does it have?
 - ☐ Do I need a reservation?
 - ☐ Are campfires allowed, and are there burn bans?
 - ☐ What are the quiet hours and other rules?
 - ☐ Is there an accessible site or route?
 - ☐ Where do I get water and store food?
 - ☐ How do we handle weather, cold, or heat?
 - ☐ Who is bringing what, and have we tested the gear?
-

Related

Nature trails and walks ([profile 7](#)). Picnics ([profile 11](#)). Parent Guide 09. [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, November 24). *Preventing food poisoning*. <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/prevention/index.html>

Consumer Product Safety Commission. (n.d.). *Portable heaters & camping equipment*. <https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/Carbon-Monoxide-Information-Center/Portable-Heaters--Camping-Equipment>

National Park Service. (n.d.). *National Park Service* [Home page]. <https://www.nps.gov>

U.S. Access Board. (n.d.). *Chapter 10: Outdoor developed areas*. <https://www.access-board.gov/aba/guides/chapter-10-outdoor/>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Picnics

SETTING

Outdoors, in a park, yard, or anywhere with a place to sit. Can also happen indoors.

TYPICAL TIME

Flexible. Thirty minutes to a few hours.

COST

Often low. Cost depends on the food and location.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Can be quiet or lively.

What to Expect

A picnic is a meal eaten outdoors. It can be a blanket in a park, a table in a pavilion, a backyard meal, a lunch on a tailgate, or a floor picnic indoors when the weather is bad.

Food can be packed from home, bought along the way, or brought by several families. Some parks have picnic tables, grills, and shelters, some of which need reservations.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Choosing and packing food:** deciding what to bring.
- **Eating in a different place:** on a blanket, in the grass, or under a tree.
- **Playing before and after:** games, a ball, or exploring nearby.
- **Trying new foods:** in a relaxed setting.
- **Helping:** laying out the blanket, carrying items, or cleaning up.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Soft finger foods, bottles or familiar foods, a blanket for sitting, and shade. Close adult supervision around food and small items.
3 to 5	Choosing between a few foods, eating, and playing nearby.
6 to 10	Helping plan and pack, then playing games.
11 to 12	Choosing the menu or location, or inviting a friend.
13 to 17	Planning a picnic, cooking or packing for the family, or meeting friends.
Adults and multigenerational	A chair or bench may matter more than a blanket. Easy-to-eat foods and shade help.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

parks may require reservations for shelters or grills and have rules on grilling, fires, glass, alcohol, and trash.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

food safety, allergies, heat, and surfaces.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- A relaxed meal without cooking at home.
- Time outdoors with no schedule.
- Conversation.
- Sharing a favorite food or tradition.
- Simplicity.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Sharing food and conversation in a new setting.
- Making a picnic a regular tradition.
- Taking turns choosing the menu or place.
- A relaxed meal when schedules are busy.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance on food safety) The CDC says to follow four steps for food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill. It says never to leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if it is exposed to temperatures above 90°F.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from picnics. This guide does not state that picnics improve nutrition, family relationships, or well-being.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A picnic may offer a relaxed setting to share a meal. What it offers depends on the family and the day.

Safety Note: Food

- Keep cold foods cold, keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods, and wash hands before handling food (CDC).
- Never leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F (CDC).
- Check for food allergies in your group before you pack. This is a practical suggestion, not from a source.
- For more information, see the CDC page on preventing food poisoning (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	A picnic can be free if you use food from home and a free space. Shelter reservations, grills, and parking may have fees.
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Crowds and noise:	Popular parks fill up on weekends and holidays. Tables and shelters may be first come or reserved.
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Waiting:	Getting a table or grill can mean waiting.
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Transportation and parking:	Check how far the picnic area is from parking. Carrying food and gear can be hard for some people.
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Accessibility:	Ask about accessible picnic tables, firm paths, and seating. A folding chair can help.
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Restrooms and handwashing:	Not every picnic area has restrooms or water. Bring sanitizer or wipes.
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Weather:	Heat, wind, rain, and insects can change a picnic. Have a backup plan.
Food and drink:	Policies on grilling, alcohol, and glass vary. Check the park's rules. Plan for trash.
Time:	A short picnic is fine. Food needs to be kept safe throughout.
Age-related rules:	Rarely an issue. Parks may have rules for groups.

Ways to Adapt

Simple food:	Sandwiches, fruit, and water work. No cooking is required.
Indoor picnic:	A blanket on the living room floor.
Quieter times:	Early or late, or on a weekday.
Mixed ages:	Pack foods for different needs. Offer jobs to children.
Sensory needs:	Choose a quiet corner. Bring familiar foods and a plan for breaks.
Dietary needs:	Plan around allergies and dietary needs. Bring separate foods.
Mobility:	Choose a spot near parking and seating. Bring a chair.
Limited transportation:	A backyard, porch, stoop, or nearby green space can work.
Lower cost:	Use what is at home, or share the food with other families.
Potluck:	Each family brings one dish.

Before You Go

- ☐ Where will we sit, and is there shade?
- ☐ Do we need to reserve a table or shelter?
- ☐ Is there water, a restroom, and a place to wash hands?
- ☐ How will we keep food cold or hot?
- ☐ Does anyone in our group have allergies or dietary needs?
- ☐ What are the park rules on grilling, alcohol, and trash?
- ☐ What is the plan if the weather changes?

Related

Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Camping ([profile 10](#)). Cooking together, trying new foods, and eating out ([profile 27](#)). Parent Guide 09.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, November 24). *Preventing food poisoning*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/prevention/index.html>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Zoos & Aquariums

SETTING

Indoor and outdoor.
Aquariums are mostly indoor. Zoos are mostly outdoor.

TYPICAL TIME

Usually a half day or more. Short visits are possible.

COST

Often higher cost, though some zoos are free or low cost and some offer discounted days.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often lively. Some exhibits are loud, dark, or crowded. Quiet areas may be available.

What to Expect

Zoos and aquariums display animals in settings meant to resemble habitats. Visits often include walking, animal talks or feedings at set times, exhibits, and sometimes rides, shows, or hands-on areas.

Facilities vary a lot in size, animals, and offerings. Families hold different views about zoos and aquariums. This guide does not take a position.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Watching animals:** how they move, eat, rest, and interact.
- **Asking questions:** why animals look and act the way they do.
- **Learning about habitats:** where animals live and what they need.
- **Moving through a large space:** walking, pointing, and following a map.
- **Meeting animals up close:** at touch pools or contact areas, where offered.
- **Talks and feedings:** listening to a keeper or educator.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking at animals from a stroller or carrier. Short visits, shade, and breaks.
3 to 5	Short stretches of walking. Favorite animals, repeating visits, and a children's zoo area, where offered.
6 to 10	Following a map, reading signs, attending talks, and asking questions.
11 to 12	Choosing a route and exhibits, and reading more about animals.
13 to 17	Following an interest, taking photographs, volunteering, or visiting with friends.
Adults and multigenerational	Long walks, hills, and heat can be tiring. Benches, shade, and mobility rentals matter to many adults.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

age limits for rides or experiences, rules about touching animals, and rules about bags, food, and strollers vary by facility.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

distance, terrain, heat, crowds, and animal contact rules.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Seeing animals they have not seen before.
- Learning about conservation and animal care.
- Seeing a child's reaction.
- A chance to walk and talk.
- Sharing a place they enjoyed as a child.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing a favorite animal each.
- Making a plan and following it, or letting children lead.
- Looking at the same animal and describing what each person notices.
- Talking about what you saw afterward.

Evidence Notes

PROGRAM INFORMATION

(*Not research*) The Association of Zoos and Aquariums says its accreditation recognizes institutions that “meet the highest professional standards for animal welfare, scientific education and staff training,” and involves a multiple-day on-site inspection. This is the association describing its own program. It is not independent evaluation. AZA publishes a list of accredited institutions and a finder tool on its website.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting zoos or aquariums. This guide does not state that a visit improves learning, empathy, or well-being, and it does not rate or recommend any zoo or aquarium.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A visit may offer a chance to watch animals and ask questions. What a person takes from it depends on the person, the animals, and the day.

Safety Note: Animal Contact

- Wash hands right after touching animals or anything in the areas where they live, roam, or eat, and when leaving animal areas. Do not eat or drink around animals (CDC).
- Children under 5 should not touch reptiles, amphibians, or poultry, and children should always be supervised around animals (CDC).
- For more information, see the CDC page on staying healthy at animal exhibits (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Admission cost:	Prices vary a lot. Ask about memberships, free or discounted days, and group rates.
Crowds and noise:	School breaks, weekends, and holidays are busy. Early mornings are often calmer.
Waiting:	Popular exhibits, shows, and rides may have lines.
Transportation and parking:	Large zoos often have large lots, and parking may be a separate fee. Check shuttles and walking distances.

Accessibility:	Offerings vary by facility. Ask about wheelchair and stroller rentals, step-free routes, quiet spaces, sensory resources, and accessible restrooms. For more information, see the Association of Zoos and Aquariums website (link in Sources).
Walking and heat:	Many zoos cover a lot of ground, sometimes with hills. Plan for shade, water, and rest.
Restrooms and changing:	Ask where they are. Large facilities usually have several.
Food and drink:	Most zoos have cafes. Policies on outside food vary. Do not eat or drink in animal contact areas.
Time:	You do not need to see everything. Choose a few areas.
Age-related rules:	Some experiences have age or height limits.

Ways to Adapt

Short visits:	Pick one section or a few favorite animals.
Quieter times:	Early in the day, on weekdays, or off-season.
Mixed ages:	Take turns choosing. Let older children read the signs aloud.
Sensory needs:	Look for sensory bags, quiet areas, or headphone zones. Know where the exits are.
Mobility:	Ask about wheelchair and stroller rentals and accessible routes.
Limited transportation:	Check for a local nature center, a farm, or a petting area.
Lower cost:	Look for free days, memberships, and library passes. Small local zoos and nature centers may cost less.
At home:	Watch an animal talk online, draw an animal from memory, or visit a local pond.

Before You Go

- ☐ What does admission include, and are there discounts?
 - ☐ What are the hours, and when are shows or feedings?
 - ☐ How big is the site, and what are the hills and distances like?
 - ☐ What sensory or accessibility offerings are there?
 - ☐ Are there wheelchairs or strollers for rent?
 - ☐ Where can we wash our hands after touching animals?
 - ☐ Can we bring food and water?
 - ☐ Are there age or height limits for any experiences?
-

Related

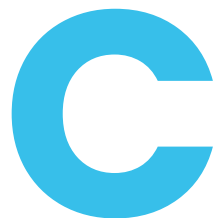
Children's museums ([profile 1](#)). Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#).

Sources

Association of Zoos and Aquariums. (n.d.). *Accreditation*. <https://www.aza.org/accreditation>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, April 9). *Tips for staying healthy at animal exhibits*. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-pets/about/staying-healthy-at-animal-exhibits.html>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.



CATEGORY 3 OF 7

Attractions & Entertainment

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Amusement Parks

SETTING

Outdoors, with rides, shows, food, and walking. Some parks also have indoor areas.

TYPICAL TIME

A half day to a full day.

COST

Often higher than most experiences in this guide. Admission, parking, food, and extras can add up. Many parks sell tickets in advance.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often high. Crowds, noise, motion, and lights are common. Some areas are calmer.

What to Expect

An amusement park is a large venue with rides, games, shows, and food. Rides range from gentle carousels to fast coasters. Many parks have areas designed for young children.

Most rides post minimum height, and sometimes age, weight, or health requirements. A visit usually involves walking, waiting in lines, and making choices about what to ride.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Trying a new feeling:** motion, speed, or height, at a pace that suits the child.
- **Choosing:** which ride, which order, and when to rest.
- **Meeting a height mark:** some children like being measured.
- **Shows and characters:** where available.
- **Games and food:** a treat or a prize.
- **Waiting and turn-taking:** queues are part of the day.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Often watching, riding a gentle ride on an adult's lap where allowed, or sitting out. Naps, shade, and quiet breaks matter.
3 to 5	Small-scale rides in a children's area, if height requirements are met. Many children this age have strong preferences about what feels fun or scary.
6 to 10	More rides become available as height requirements are met. Children may want to choose and may need help judging what suits them.
11 to 12	Many rides are open. Some children want independence. Plan how the group stays in contact.
13 to 17	Many teens enjoy larger rides and time with friends. Park policies on unaccompanied minors vary, so check.
Adults and multigenerational	Grandparents or others may prefer shows, seating, and slower areas. Adults can ride, watch, or hold belongings.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

posted height, age, weight, and health requirements for each ride, and park policies for unaccompanied minors.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

restraints, posted rules, supervision, and accessibility information for each ride.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Rides they enjoy themselves.
- Seeing a child try something new.
- Shows and a break from routine.
- Food and treats.
- Nostalgia for a place they visited as a child.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Riding a ride together.
- Agreeing on a plan for the day.
- Taking turns choosing.
- Splitting up and meeting back at a set time.
- Coping with a long line or a ride that was scarier than expected.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The Illinois Department of Labor advises parents to check posted height, age, weight, and health requirements, use all restraints, know that a lap bar may not hold a small child in place, follow the operator's instructions, and not put a child on a ride they fear. The Amputee Coalition says rides fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and that individual state laws and ride manufacturers also set rules. These are guidance from one state agency and one nonprofit. They are not a national standard.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting amusement parks. This guide does not state that a visit improves well-being or family bonds. It does not compare the safety of parks or rides.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A visit may offer shared excitement and a chance to try something new. How a family experiences it depends on the child, the day, and the crowds.

Safety Note: Rides

- Check posted requirements before boarding and decide whether the ride suits your child, even if they meet the height mark (Illinois Department of Labor).
- Use all safety equipment, follow the operator's instructions, and keep arms, legs, and head inside the ride (Illinois Department of Labor).
- Plan for separation: pick a meeting spot and show your child which staff can help (Illinois Department of Labor).
- Rules vary by state and park. Check your state's ride safety agency.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Admission, parking, food, lockers, and extras. Many parks have advance tickets or other ticket types. Check the park's website.
Crowds and noise:	Weekends, holidays, and summer are busier. Lines can be long.
Waiting:	Lines can be hard for young children. Ask about accessibility or ride-return options, which vary by park.
Transportation and parking:	Parks can be large. Parking may be far from the entrance. Some offer stroller and wheelchair rentals.

Accessibility:	Many parks post an accessibility guide online, often under “Plan Your Visit,” “Accessibility,” or “Guests With Disabilities.” Call guest services with questions (Amputee Coalition). Rules about medical devices on rides vary by ride.
Restrooms and changing:	Check the park map. Family restrooms and changing tables vary.
Food and drink:	Many parks limit outside food. Check allergy options. Water is important in heat.
Time:	A full day is long for young children. A shorter visit is fine.
Age-related rules:	Height, age, and sometimes weight or health requirements are posted at each ride.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Focus on the children’s area and take breaks.
Height limits:	Check the ride list before you go so children know what to expect.
Fear or caution:	Watch a ride first. Skipping is fine.
Sensory needs:	Take breaks in quiet areas. Bring ear protection if it helps. Ask the park about sensory or accessibility resources.
Mobility:	Ask about accessible entrances, seating, and rentals.
Medical devices:	Ask guest services before the visit about restrictions for specific rides (Amputee Coalition).
Lower cost:	A shorter visit, advance tickets, bringing allowed food, or smaller local parks and fairs.
Mixed ages:	Split into groups with a set time to regroup.

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the height, age, and other requirements for the rides we want?
 - ☐ Does the park post an accessibility guide?
 - ☐ Where will we meet if we get separated?
 - ☐ What can we bring in, and what is the food policy?
 - ☐ Where are shade, water, and quiet breaks?
 - ☐ What is our plan if someone is afraid or tired?
 - ☐ How long will we stay?
-

Related

Water parks ([profile 14](#)). Festivals, community celebrations, and seasonal traditions ([profile 19](#)).
Family entertainment centers (profile 15). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Amputee Coalition. (n.d.). *Amusement park accessibility*. <https://amputee-coalition.org/amusement-park-accessibility/>

Illinois Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Safety tips*. Amusement Ride and Attraction Safety Division.
<https://labor.illinois.gov/rides/safety-tips.html>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Water Parks

SETTING

Outdoor or indoor, with pools, slides, splash areas, and lazy rivers.

TYPICAL TIME

A few hours to a full day.

COST

Often moderate to high. Admission, parking, rentals, and food can add up. Some venues sell tickets in advance.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often high. Noise, echo, crowds, and splashing are common. Some areas are calmer.

What to Expect

A water park has pools and water play areas, often including slides, wave pools, lazy rivers, and areas for younger children. Many have lifeguards. Slides and some pools post height or swimming-ability requirements.

Visitors usually bring swimwear, sun protection, and a towel. Many parks sell or rent towels, lockers, and life jackets.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Water play:** splashing, floating, and moving through water.
- **Trying slides:** at a pace and height that suits the child.
- **Building comfort in water:** in shallow areas, with an adult close by.
- **Choosing:** where to go and what to try.
- **Waiting and turn-taking:** slide lines.
- **Playing with other children:** in splash areas.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Shallow water, splash areas, and an adult in the water within arm's reach. Shade and breaks matter.
3 to 5	Splash areas and shallow pools. Life jackets may be required or advised in some areas.
6 to 10	Some slides open as height or swimming requirements are met. Children may need help judging what suits them.
11 to 12	More areas open. Some children are ready to choose their own path. Agree on a meeting spot.
13 to 17	Many teens enjoy slides and time with friends. Park policies on unaccompanied minors vary, so check.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can play, watch, or sit in shade. Loungers, shallow areas, and lazy rivers can suit different needs.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

height, age, and swimming-ability requirements, life jacket rules, and policies on swim diapers and food.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

supervision, life jackets, lifeguards, water quality, heat, and accessible entry.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing in the water with children.
- Relaxing in a lazy river or shaded seating.
- A cool place in hot weather.
- Slides, if they enjoy them.
- A day out with no cooking or planning.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Playing in the water together.
- Floating down a lazy river.
- Riding a slide together, where allowed.
- Agreeing on where to meet.
- Taking breaks for snacks and shade.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The CDC says an adult should always be within arm's length of a child in or near water, even when a lifeguard is present, and that swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning (January 27, 2026). The CDC also says germs in pools and water play areas can make people sick, and children are at higher risk (June 6, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting water parks. This guide does not state that a visit improves swimming skills, health, or family bonds. It does not say that a water park is safe or unsafe.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A visit may offer water play and a cool break in warm weather. What it offers depends on the child, the venue, and the crowds.

Safety Note: Water

- An adult should always be within arm's length of a child in or near water, even when a lifeguard is present (CDC).
- Children and adults are best protected by wearing life jackets approved by the U.S. Coast Guard in or around open water (CDC). Ask the park what life jackets it provides.
- Check posted height and swimming requirements before using a slide.
- For more information, see the CDC pages on summer swim safety and on preventing swimming-related illnesses (links in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Admission, parking, lockers, towel rental, and food. Some venues have lower weekday or late-day rates. Check the website.
Crowds and noise:	Summer weekends and holidays are busiest. Indoor parks can be loud.
Waiting:	Popular slides have lines.
Transportation and parking:	Parking may be far from the entrance. Carrying gear can be hard.
Accessibility:	Ask about accessible entry to pools, lifts, and which slides and areas are open to all.

Restrooms and changing:	Ask about family changing rooms, locker rooms, and swim diaper policies.
Food and drink:	Many parks limit outside food. Water is important in heat.
Weather and sun:	Outdoor parks may close for storms. Plan for shade and sun protection.
Time:	Cold, tired children may need a break. A shorter visit is fine.
Age-related rules:	Height, age, and swimming-ability requirements vary by area. Life jacket rules vary.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Stay in splash areas and shallow pools. Keep an adult within arm's reach.
Not yet swimming:	Ask about life jackets and shallow areas.
Sensory needs:	Take breaks in quiet or shaded areas. Ear protection may help in loud areas.
Mobility:	Ask about accessible routes, entry, and seating.
Lower cost:	A community pool, splash pad, or sprinkler (see profile 21).
Mixed ages:	Choose a base near shallow areas. Take turns watching and playing.
Sensitive skin or eyes:	Bring goggles, a change of clothes, and a plan for breaks.

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the height and swimming requirements for the slides we want?
- ☐ Are life jackets available, and are they required?
- ☐ Are lifeguards on duty, and where do we sit?
- ☐ What is the policy on food, drinks, and swim diapers?
- ☐ Where will we meet if we get separated?
- ☐ Where are shade and a place to rest?
- ☐ What is the plan if the weather changes?

Related

Swimming, pools, and splash pads ([profile 21](#)). Beaches, lakes, and rivers ([profile 8](#)). Amusement parks ([profile 13](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026, January 27). *Summer swim safety*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/prevention/summer-swim-safety.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, June 6). *Preventing swimming-related illnesses*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-swimming/prevention/>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Family Entertainment Centers

SETTING

Mostly indoors. Arcades, laser tag, escape rooms, mini bowling, and similar activities.

TYPICAL TIME

One to three hours.

COST

Varies from moderate to high. Many activities are priced per game, per person, or per package.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often high. Arcades can be loud, bright, and busy. Escape rooms and laser tag can be dark or intense.

What to Expect

A family entertainment center combines several activities under one roof. An arcade has games that may give tickets or prizes. A laser tag arena is a dark, themed space where players tag each other with light-based tools. An escape room is a themed space where a group solves puzzles within a time limit.

Many centers offer party rooms, food, and packages. Arcades may use a prepaid card. Activities usually post age, height, or group-size rules.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Games of skill and chance:** trying and retrying.
- **Working as a team:** in escape rooms and group games.
- **Problem-solving:** clues and puzzles.
- **Active play:** in laser tag and similar activities.
- **Managing money or a card:** deciding how to spend a set amount.
- **Winning, losing, and trying again.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Often a poor fit for noise, lights, and dark rooms. Some centers have a toddler or soft play area.
3 to 5	Simple arcade games, toddler areas, or watching. Dark rooms and loud noise may feel too much.
6 to 10	Arcade games, mini bowling, and some laser tag or escape rooms, depending on the venue's age rules.
11 to 12	More activities are open. Many enjoy team games and challenges.
13 to 17	Many teens enjoy escape rooms, laser tag, and arcades with friends. Unaccompanied-minor policies vary.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can play, coach, or watch. Escape rooms can be a shared activity if the venue allows mixed ages.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

age and height limits, group size, waivers, and policies on unaccompanied minors.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

dark and loud spaces, physical contact rules, and accessibility of rooms and arenas.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing with their children.
 - Team challenges and puzzles.
 - Nostalgia for arcade games.
 - A set activity with an end time.
 - A place for a group or celebration.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Working together on a puzzle or challenge.
- Playing against each other or on the same team.
- Celebrating a birthday or milestone.
- Laughing when something goes wrong.
- Trying something new in a group.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	In the sources reviewed, I did not find independent research or government guidance on arcades, escape rooms, or laser tag. This profile therefore contains no research claims.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	This guide does not state that these activities improve teamwork, problem-solving, or family relationships, and it does not describe safety records of any venue type.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	These activities may give a group a shared goal and a chance to play together. What a family gets from them depends on the people and the venue.

Potential Considerations

All items on this profile are practical considerations. I did not find a source.

Cost:	Pricing varies by game, time, or package. Prepaid cards can run out fast. Set a limit before you go.
Crowds and noise:	Arcades are often loud and busy, especially on weekends and at parties.
Waiting:	Popular games or time slots may have waits. Escape rooms and laser tag often need reservations.
Transportation and parking:	Many are in shopping centers or entertainment districts with parking nearby.
Accessibility:	Ask about accessible routes, quiet times, and whether rooms or arenas can be adapted. Escape rooms can involve small or dark spaces.
Restrooms and changing:	Check availability.
Food and drink:	Many have food. Check allergy options and outside food rules.
Time:	Escape rooms and laser tag have set times. Arcades are flexible.
Age-related rules:	Minimum age, height, and group size vary by activity. Some require a waiver or an adult in the room. Check before booking.
Content:	Some themes or games may be scary or violent. Check the theme and rating with the venue.

Ways to Adapt

Sensory needs:	Ask about quiet hours or lower-volume times. Ear protection may help.
Fear of the dark:	Ask whether lights can be kept on, or choose arcade games.
Young children:	Choose a toddler area or arcade games with a short visit.
Mixed ages:	Choose activities that allow mixed ages, or split up.
Spending limits:	Set a card or ticket limit before arriving.
Mobility:	Ask about the layout and whether a room or arena is accessible.
Lower cost:	Choose one activity, go at off-peak times, or play home versions (see profile 28).
Team challenge:	Assign roles in an escape room, such as clue reader and organizer.

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the age, height, and group-size rules?
 - ☐ Do we need a reservation or a waiver?
 - ☐ Is the space dark, loud, or confined?
 - ☐ What is the content or theme?
 - ☐ How does pricing work, and what is our limit?
 - ☐ Is there an accessible option?
 - ☐ What is the food and outside-food policy?
-

Related

Bowling and miniature golf ([profile 24](#)). Family game nights (profile 28). Indoor play spaces and play cafes ([profile 16](#)). Amusement parks ([profile 13](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

No sources were found that met this guide's standard for this profile. Venue websites are the best source for current rules.

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Indoor Play Spaces & Play Cafes

SETTING

Indoors. Soft play, climbing structures, ball pits, trampolines, or sensory rooms. Some are cafes with a play area.

TYPICAL TIME

One to three hours.

COST

Low to moderate. Some charge per child, some per time slot, some offer memberships. Adults may pay or be free.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often high. Noise and echo are common. Some offer calmer or sensory-friendly times.

What to Expect

An indoor play space is a venue built for children to move and play. Some are for toddlers and young children with soft play, climbing structures, and slides. Others are for older children, with trampolines or larger structures.

A play cafe adds a place for adults to sit, with coffee and food, while children play. Some have a separate area for babies. Many require socks and set age or height limits for each area.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Climbing, crawling, sliding, and jumping.**
- **Pretend play:** in play kitchens, shops, or houses.
- **Playing with other children:** sharing and taking turns.
- **Trying things:** at their own pace.
- **Sensory play:** in sensory rooms or with sand, water, or balls.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	A baby or toddler area, with an adult close by. Crawling and exploring soft surfaces. Separate areas from older children are common.
3 to 5	Soft play, climbing, and pretend play. Adults stay close.
6 to 10	Larger structures, climbing walls, and trampolines, where age and height rules allow.
11 to 12	Many outgrow play spaces, though some venues have areas for older children or groups.
13 to 17	Often a poor fit, though teens may join siblings, work as helpers, or attend parties.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can watch, join, or rest. Grandparents can enjoy a seat and a coffee.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
age and height limits per area, socks, supervision rules, waivers, and food policies.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
cleaning, hygiene, crowding, and equipment condition.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Time to sit while children play.
 - Coffee or food.
 - Meeting other parents or caregivers.
 - A place to go in bad weather.
 - Conversation.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Playing alongside each other.
- Meeting other families.
- Taking a break from the weather.
- A shared snack or meal.
- A routine, such as a weekly visit.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The Minnesota Department of Health says indoor play areas can become a public health and safety hazard if not properly maintained. It says handwashing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of germs, that hand sanitizer is not a substitute and is not effective against norovirus, and that equipment should be routinely inspected. It lists actions for parents: know where to wash hands before and after play, have children eat at tables rather than in the play area, and keep children who are sick with vomiting or diarrhea out of the play area (January 8, 2025). This is one state agency's guidance, written mainly for operators.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, trampolines) The American Academy of Pediatrics advises keeping children off trampolines except in settings with professional coaches and specialized equipment. It says children under 6 should never jump. For trampoline parks, it advises waiting until a child is at least 6, staying close, and visiting at less crowded times (September 3, 2024).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from indoor play spaces or play cafes. This guide does not state that they improve development, and it does not rate any venue.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

An indoor play space may offer a place for active play in bad weather and a chance to meet other families. What it offers depends on the venue and the day.

Safety Note: Hygiene and Trampolines

- Wash hands before and after play, and keep children who are sick with vomiting or diarrhea out of the play area (Minnesota Department of Health).
- Have children eat at tables, not in the play area (Minnesota Department of Health).
- The AAP advises that children under 6 should not jump on trampolines, and that trampoline parks are best saved for children at least 6, with close adult supervision (AAP).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost: Per child, per time slot, or by membership. Adults may pay. Check for off-peak, weekday, or morning rates.

Crowds and noise:	Busy at weekends, holidays, and in bad weather. Some venues limit capacity. Ask about quiet times.
Waiting:	Timed entry may be required. Reserve ahead for popular times.
Transportation and parking:	Often in shopping or business areas. Check parking.
Accessibility:	Ask about entry, seating, play areas for children with disabilities, and quiet or sensory-friendly sessions.
Restrooms and changing:	Check for family restrooms and changing tables.
Food and drink:	Cafes often limit outside food. Check allergy policies and where eating is allowed.
Time:	Young children tire quickly. A shorter visit is fine.
Age-related rules:	Areas often have age and height limits. Many require socks and an adult. Check the venue's rules.

Ways to Adapt

Babies and toddlers:	Choose venues with a separate baby or toddler area.
Sensory needs:	Ask about quiet or sensory-friendly sessions, or visit at off-peak times.
Mixed ages:	Ask which areas suit different ages. Take turns supervising.
Mobility:	Ask about seating and accessible routes. Some venues allow adults to join play.
Lower cost:	Public libraries, parks, and recreation centers may offer free or lower-cost play (see profiles 4, 6, and 26).
Illness:	Skip the visit if your child is unwell.
Overwhelm:	Take breaks outside or in a quiet corner.

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the age and height rules for each area?
 - ☐ Do we need socks, a reservation, or a waiver?
 - ☐ Is there a separate area for babies or toddlers?
 - ☐ How is the space cleaned, and where do we wash hands?
 - ☐ What is the policy on outside food and allergies?
 - ☐ Are there quiet or sensory-friendly times?
 - ☐ How long will we stay?
-

Related

Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Recreation and community centers ([profile 26](#)). Children's museums ([profile 1](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024, September 3). *Are trampolines safe for kids?* HealthyChildren.org.
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Trampolines-What-You-Need-to-Know.aspx>

Minnesota Department of Health. (2025, January 8). *Indoor play areas*.
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/food/indoorplay/indoorplayms.html>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Movies

SETTING

A movie theater, or at home. Drive-ins and community screenings in some places.

TYPICAL TIME

One and a half to three hours, including previews.

COST

Low to moderate. Tickets and snacks add up. Matinees and community screenings are often lower. Watching at home can be free.

SENSORY LEVEL

Moderate to high in a theater. Dark, loud, and large screens. Lower at home.

What to Expect

A movie in a theater means a dark room, a large screen, loud sound, and previews before the film. Seats are assigned in some theaters and open in others. Snacks are common.

Watching at home gives control over volume, lights, breaks, and captions. Some libraries and community groups host free screenings.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Following a story:** characters, plot, and feelings.
- **Handling big feelings:** sad, scary, or funny scenes.
- **Sitting and watching:** at a pace that suits them.
- **Sharing a reaction:** talking afterward.
- **Choosing a film:** with family.
- **Different cultures or stories:** through film.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Often a poor fit for a theater because of noise, dark, and length. Short viewing at home is possible.
3 to 5	Short, gentle films. Loud sound and dark rooms may be too much. A first theater visit may be brief.
6 to 10	Longer films. Children differ in how they handle scary or intense scenes.
11 to 12	Many choose their own films and want to sit with friends.
13 to 17	Many go with friends. Ratings and venue policies vary.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can watch with children, or choose films for all ages. Seating, sound level, and captions matter for some.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

film ratings, age policies for evening or restricted films, and policies on outside food.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

captioning and audio description devices, quiet or sensory-friendly showings, wheelchair seating, and sound level.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- A film they enjoy.
 - Sitting with the family without screens in hand.
 - A break from routine.
 - Shared reactions and talking afterward.
 - Nostalgia, when seeing a film from their childhood.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing a film together.
- Laughing, being scared, or crying together.
- Talking about the film afterward.
- A regular movie night.
- Sharing snacks.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Law and program information) Under U.S. Department of Justice rules under the Americans with Disabilities Act, movie theaters showing digital movies must have captioning and audio description devices available and must tell the public about them. The rules include an undue-burden limit. They do not require movies themselves to carry captions, and they allow open captions but do not require them (final rule published December 2, 2016, effective January 17, 2017). AMC Theatres' own program page says its sensory friendly showings "turn the lights up, and turn the sound down" so guests can get up, dance, walk, shout, or sing. It lists four showings a month, on the second and fourth Tuesdays and Saturdays, with Saturday showings aimed at families. This is a theater chain describing its own program. The page shows no date, so confirm current times with your local theater. Other theaters may offer similar showings; I did not verify any.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from watching movies. This guide does not state that movies improve learning, emotions, or family bonds. It does not recommend or rate any film or theater chain.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A movie may offer a shared experience and something to talk about. What a family gets from it depends on the film, the setting, and the people.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Tickets, snacks, and drinks. Matinees, discount days, and community screenings may cost less. Check each venue.
Crowds and noise:	Opening weekends and holidays are busiest. Theaters are loud, and some children are sensitive to sound.
Waiting:	Previews can add 15 to 20 minutes or more. Arrive early for seating.
Transportation and parking:	Check parking and distance to the entrance.
Accessibility:	Theaters showing digital movies must offer captioning and audio description devices on request (U.S. Department of Justice). Ask about wheelchair seating and companion seats.
Restrooms and changing:	Check availability. Plan a restroom stop before the film.

Food and drink:	Many theaters limit outside food. Check allergy policies.
Time:	Films can run long. Leaving early is fine.
Age-related rules:	Ratings are guidance. Some theaters have age rules for restricted films or evening showings.
Content:	Check the film's rating and content with a trusted source before going.

Ways to Adapt

Sensory needs:	Ask the theater about sensory-friendly showings, such as AMC's program (see Evidence Notes). Bring ear protection. Sit near an exit. Home viewing allows lower volume and lights.
Hearing or vision needs:	Ask for a captioning or audio description device (U.S. Department of Justice).
Young children:	Choose short films, matinees, or watch at home.
Mixed ages:	Choose a film that works for all, or watch at home with breaks.
Mobility:	Ask about accessible seating and companion seats.
Lower cost:	Library screenings, community screenings, matinees, or a home movie night.
Fear or intensity:	Preview the film, or watch at home where you can pause.
Home viewing:	Make it an occasion with snacks, a blanket fort, and a chat afterward.

Before You Go

- ☐ What is the rating and content of the film?
- ☐ What is the running time, and how long are the previews?
- ☐ Does the theater offer sensory-friendly showings, captioning, or audio description devices?
- ☐ Is there accessible seating?
- ☐ What is the food policy?
- ☐ Where will we sit, and is it near an exit?
- ☐ What is the plan if someone wants to leave?

Related

Live performances ([profile 18](#)). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Time with family and friends ([profile 31](#)). At-home themed experiences (profile 30). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

AMC Theatres. (n.d.). *Sensory friendly films*. <https://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films>

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (n.d.). *Questions and answers about the Department of Justice's final rule requiring movie theaters to provide closed movie captioning and audio description*. https://archive.ada.gov/regs2016/movie_captioning_qa.html

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.



CATEGORY 4 OF 7

Arts & Culture

18	Live Performances	94
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Live Performances

SETTING

Theaters, concert halls, schools, libraries, parks, houses of worship, and community venues.

TYPICAL TIME

About 45 minutes for children's shows, to 3 hours for longer performances.

COST

Varies from free to high. Many communities have free or low-cost performances in parks, libraries, and schools.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Often dark with amplified sound. Some performances offer lower sound and light levels.

What to Expect

A live performance has performers and an audience in the same space. Shows made for children are often shorter, with audience participation. Other performances are not made for children, and venues set their own age policies.

Most venues have assigned or open seating, an arrival time, and rules on photos, food, and talking. Many offer a program, an intermission, or a talk afterward.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Watching and listening:** to music, movement, and stories.
- **Following a story:** characters, plot, and feelings.
- **Audience manners:** when to clap, when to be quiet.
- **Responding:** laughing, clapping, singing, or dancing where invited.
- **Seeing how it's made:** costumes, instruments, lighting.
- **Different cultures and traditions:** through music, dance, or theater.
- **Imagining what they might do:** some children want to try it afterward.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Short, participatory shows made for babies and toddlers, in relaxed settings. Loud sound and dark rooms may be too much.
3 to 5	Shows of 30 to 45 minutes with music, puppets, or audience participation. Wiggling and leaving the room are common.
6 to 10	Longer shows, family concerts, and plays made for children.
11 to 12	Many enjoy larger productions or a show tied to a school or interest.
13 to 17	Many attend with friends or perform. Concerts and larger events may have age or supervision policies.
Adults and multigenerational	Seating, sound level, and the length of the show matter. Some venues offer captioning or audio description.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
age recommendations, ticket rules for babies and young children, late seating, and policies on photos and food.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
sound level, lighting, seating, accessible routes, and sensory-friendly options.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Music, theater, or dance they enjoy.
 - Seeing a child's reaction.
 - A shared outing that is not a screen.
 - Local artists and community events.
 - Conversation afterward.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Dressing up or planning an outing.
- Sharing a reaction, such as laughing or being moved.
- Talking about what they saw and heard.
- Starting a tradition, such as a yearly show.
- Supporting a family member who performs.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Program information) The Kennedy Center describes its sensory-friendly performances as having lower sound levels, especially for startling or loud sounds, dim lights left on in the theater, reduced strobe and audience-focused lights, freedom to talk and leave seats, designated quiet areas, and story and resource materials for preparing for a visit. This is one venue describing its own program. Other venues may offer something similar under different names. I did not verify any other venue.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, loud sound) The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) says sound at or above 85 dBA can cause hearing loss, that very loud sounds can cause damage in under 15 minutes, and that children should wear hearing protection at loud events such as concerts and movies. It says padded earmuffs come in child sizes and are often easier for young children to use, and that the best protection is the kind a child will actually wear (April 28, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from attending live performances. This guide does not state that attending a performance improves learning, empathy, or well-being.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A live performance may offer a shared experience and exposure to music, stories, or movement. What a family gets from it depends on the performance and the people.

Safety Note: Loud Sound

- Sound at or above 85 dBA can cause hearing loss, and very loud sounds can cause damage in under 15 minutes (NIDCD).
- Children should wear hearing protection at loud events such as concerts and movies. Padded earmuffs come in child sizes and are often easier for young children (NIDCD).
- Check the seal. Glasses, hats, or hairstyles can create gaps (NIDCD).
- For more information, see the NIDCD page (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Tickets vary widely. Check for family, matinee, or community rates. Some venues charge for babies. Many libraries, parks, and schools host free performances.
Crowds and noise:	Large venues are crowded and loud. Smaller shows are often calmer.
Waiting:	Doors open early. Late arrivals may be asked to wait. Intermissions can have long lines.
Transportation and parking:	Downtown venues can have costly or limited parking. Check transit.
Accessibility:	Ask about wheelchair seating, companion seats, captioning, audio description, assistive listening, and sensory-friendly performances.
Restrooms and changing:	Check for family restrooms and changing tables. Plan a restroom stop before the show.
Food and drink:	Many venues limit food in the theater.
Time:	Shorter shows suit younger children. Leaving early is fine.
Age-related rules:	Venues set age recommendations or minimum ages. Some require every attendee to have a ticket.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Choose shows made for their age. Sit on an aisle or near an exit.
Sensory needs:	Ask about sensory-friendly performances. Bring earmuffs. Preview the venue and show if materials are available (Kennedy Center).
Hearing or vision needs:	Ask about captioning, audio description, or assistive listening.
Mixed ages:	Choose a show that works for all, or take turns attending.
Mobility:	Ask about accessible seating and routes.
Lower cost:	Library shows, school performances, park concerts, community events, and rehearsals.
Not ready to sit:	Try outdoor performances where moving is expected.
At home:	Sing, dance, or put on a show together.

Before You Go

- ☐ What is the age recommendation, and does every person need a ticket?
 - ☐ How long is the show, and is there an intermission?
 - ☐ Is the sound loud, and should we bring earmuffs?
 - ☐ Is there an accessible or sensory-friendly option?
 - ☐ Where are the restrooms?
 - ☐ What is the food and photo policy?
 - ☐ What is our plan if someone needs to leave?
-

Related

Movies ([profile 17](#)). Festivals, community celebrations, and seasonal traditions ([profile 19](#)). Making art and music ([profile 20](#)). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Kennedy Center. (n.d.). *Sensory-friendly performances*. <https://www.kennedy-center.org/visit/accessibility/sensory/>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *Protect your child's hearing*. <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/protect-your-childs-hearing>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *How loud is too loud?* <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/how-loud-too-loud>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Festivals, Community Celebrations & Seasonal and Holiday Traditions

SETTING

Streets, parks, fairgrounds, schools, houses of worship, cultural centers, and homes.

TYPICAL TIME

An hour to a full day, or a season.

COST

Often low or free. Some have admission, food, or activity costs.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Parades, fireworks, and festivals can be loud and crowded. Home traditions can be quiet.

What to Expect

This profile covers public and private gatherings that mark a time, place, culture, faith, or season. Examples are cultural festivals, parades, fairs, food festivals, block parties, holiday markets, lantern or light events, harvest events, family reunions, and home or faith-based traditions.

Public events often have music, food, vendors, activities, and crowds. Private traditions are shaped by the family.

Families differ in which traditions they observe. This guide does not define or rank any tradition. It describes what happens at events and what families may want to plan for.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Learning about their own and other cultures:** food, music, dress, and stories.
- **Taking part:** dancing, crafts, helping prepare, or joining a ritual.
- **Seeing traditions from relatives:** hearing why a tradition matters.
- **Trying new foods.**
- **Being in a crowd:** staying together and following the plan.
- **Waiting and anticipation:** for a parade, a meal, or a day.
- **Different roles:** helper, performer, or guest.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Watching from a carrier, stroller, or lap. Loud sounds, crowds, and late hours may be hard. Quiet breaks help.
3 to 5	Short visits, simple activities, and familiar rituals. Children may ask many questions about why.
6 to 10	Taking part in activities, learning the meaning, and helping prepare.
11 to 12	Taking more responsibility, such as helping run a table or a task.
13 to 17	Volunteering, performing, or attending with friends. Some teens question or reshape traditions.
Adults and multigenerational	Elders may share stories and traditions. Seating, shade, and slower paces matter.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
event rules on bags, coolers, pets, strollers, and alcohol; some events limit entry or sell tickets.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
crowds, noise, heat or cold, traffic, and accessible routes.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Passing on or learning family and cultural traditions.
 - Food, music, and art.
 - Meeting neighbors and community members.
 - Seeing a child connect with their heritage.
 - A change of pace from the usual week.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Preparing for an event or tradition together.
- Sharing stories about the past.
- Eating, singing, or dancing together.
- Making a tradition their own.
- Welcoming relatives and neighbors.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, loud sound) The NIDCD lists fireworks displays at 140 to 160 dBA and sporting events at 94 to 110 dBA, and says very loud sounds can cause damage in under 15 minutes. It says children should wear hearing protection at loud events such as fireworks shows, concerts, and sporting events, and that padded earmuffs are often easier for young children to use (April 28, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from festivals, celebrations, or traditions. This guide does not state that they improve identity, belonging, or well-being. It does not rank or define any tradition.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Festivals and traditions may offer shared meaning and time with family and neighbors. What families get from them depends on the event, the tradition, and the people.

Safety Note: Crowds and Loud Sound

- Fireworks and sporting events can be very loud. Padded earmuffs are often easier for young children to use (NIDCD).
- Agree on a meeting spot, and make sure children know a safe adult to approach. (Practical suggestion, not from a source.)
- For more information, see the NIDCD page (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Many are free. Food, rides, crafts, and parking may cost extra.
Crowds and noise:	Large events are crowded and loud. Early arrival often means smaller crowds.
Waiting:	Lines for food, rides, and restrooms can be long.
Transportation and parking:	Streets may close. Parking can be far. Check for shuttles.
Accessibility:	Ask about accessible routes, seating, parking, and viewing areas.
Restrooms and changing:	Portable restrooms are common. Check availability.

Food and drink:	Check allergies and ingredients with vendors. Bring water.
Weather:	Outdoor events are affected by heat, cold, and rain.
Time:	Evening events run late for young children. Leaving early is fine.
Age-related rules:	Some events or activities set age rules or require adults.
Respect:	Some events are religious or cultural. Ask how to take part respectfully, and whether photos are welcome.

Ways to Adapt

Sensory needs:	Arrive early, find a quieter spot, bring earmuffs, and plan breaks.
Young children:	Attend part of the event. Choose daytime activities.
Mixed ages:	Assign roles. Offer older children a task, and give younger ones a quiet place.
Mobility:	Choose a viewing spot near parking and seating.
Limited transportation:	Look for events within walking distance, or hold your own gathering.
Lower cost:	Free community events, library programs, and home traditions.
Home traditions:	Cook a family dish, tell a story, or make decorations.
New traditions:	Start a small yearly habit.
Differing beliefs or practices:	Talk with your family about which events to attend and how.

Before You Go

- ☐ What is the event, and what is the schedule?
 - ☐ Is it a good fit for our family's values and traditions?
 - ☐ How crowded and loud will it be?
 - ☐ Where will we park, and where will we meet if separated?
 - ☐ Are there restrooms and shade or seating?
 - ☐ What are the rules on bags, food, and strollers?
 - ☐ What is our plan if we need to leave?
-

Related

Live performances ([profile 18](#)). Making art and music ([profile 20](#)). Exploring a different neighborhood ([profile 29](#)). Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). Time with family and friends ([profile 31](#)). Parent Guide 09. [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *Protect your child's hearing*. <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/protect-your-childs-hearing>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *How loud is too loud?* <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/how-loud-too-loud>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Making Art and Music

SETTING

Home, libraries, community centers, studios, schools, and parks.

TYPICAL TIME

Ten minutes to a few hours. Short sessions work well for young children.

COST

From free to high. Home materials can be inexpensive. Instruments and classes cost more.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Messy materials and loud instruments may be a lot for some children.

What to Expect

Making art and music means creating, not watching. At home, this can be drawing, collage, playdough, singing, tapping rhythms, or playing a simple instrument. In the community, libraries, community centers, and studios may offer open studio time, drop-in programs, jam sessions, and classes.

Classes and workshops that teach skills are covered in Parent Guide 03. This profile is about the experience of making.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Making marks and shapes:** scribbles, lines, colors.
- **Using materials:** paint, clay, paper, found objects.
- **Making sounds and rhythms:** voice, hands, and instruments.
- **Telling a story:** through a picture, a song, or a dance.
- **Choosing:** colors, materials, and what to make.
- **Mixing and experimenting.**
- **Sharing work:** showing or talking about what they made.
- **Working with others:** making something together.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Exploring safe, non-toxic materials with an adult close by, banging a pot, shaking a rattle, and listening to songs. Things often go in the mouth, so avoid small items.
3 to 5	Scribbling, painting, playdough, singing, and simple instruments. The process matters more to children this age than the finished product.
6 to 10	Drawing from observation, crafts, learning songs, and trying an instrument or class.
11 to 12	Developing interests and skills, and wanting their work to look the way they imagine.
13 to 17	Pursuing a medium, joining a group, band, or club, and sharing work with others.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can make alongside children. Grandparents may share songs, crafts, or skills.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
program age limits, materials policies, and drop-off versus adult-attend rules.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
non-toxic materials, small parts, noise, and accessible materials and tools.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Making something with their hands.
 - Sharing songs or crafts from their own childhood.
 - A screen-free activity.
 - Seeing a child's ideas.
 - A low-pressure way to spend time together.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Making a picture, song, or project together.
- Showing each other what they made.
- Sharing songs and traditions across generations.
- Making gifts or decorations.
- Displaying work at home.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	(<i>Professional guidance</i>) A 2023 article in NAEYC's <i>Teaching Young Children</i> by Ron Grady describes how educators stopped drawing for children, asked open-ended questions such as "Tell me about what you have here," described specific features of the work instead of giving general praise, and wrote down children's own words about their art. The article says a young child's scribbles can reflect an understanding of letters, names, and family. This is a practice article for educators, not a study.
ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	(<i>AAP</i>) The AAP's "Power of Play" web article says that for ages 4 to 6, "activities that involve music and art support cognitive, social-emotional and multisensory skills." It recommends regular reading, singing, and unstructured play with children, and says parents' presence and attention enriches children (last updated May 3, 2023).
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	This guide does not state that making art or music will improve school performance, talent, or well-being. I did not review studies on music lessons or arts education.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	Making art and music may offer a way to express ideas and spend time together. What a child gets from it depends on the child, the materials, and the support around them.

Safety Note: Materials and Sound

- Choose materials labeled non-toxic and age-appropriate. Keep small items away from children who put things in their mouths. (Practical suggestion, not from a source. Check labels.)
- Sound at or above 85 dBA can cause hearing loss. Padded earmuffs are often easier for young children to use (NIDCD).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Home materials can be low-cost. Classes, instruments, and supplies cost more. Libraries and community centers may offer free programs.
Crowds and noise:	Group programs can be noisy. Instruments can be loud in small spaces.
Waiting:	Popular classes may have waitlists.

Transportation and parking:	Check how far the program is from home and transit.
Accessibility:	Ask about adaptive tools, seating, and sensory-friendly sessions.
Restrooms and changing:	Check availability at community venues.
Mess:	Art can be messy. Wear old clothes and cover surfaces.
Time:	Young children may work for only a few minutes. That is fine.
Age-related rules:	Programs set age ranges and some require an adult to stay.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Offer simple materials and short sessions. Focus on the process.
Sensory needs:	Choose materials that feel comfortable. Offer a quieter space. Some children dislike sticky or wet textures.
Mixed ages:	Everyone works on their own piece at the same table.
Mobility or motor needs:	Try larger or easy-grip tools, or other materials.
Lower cost:	Use household items, recycled materials, and free library programs.
Perfectionism:	Try process-focused projects with no right answer.
Making music at home:	Sing, clap rhythms, or use pots and pans or homemade shakers.
Sharing:	Display work at home, or share it with relatives.

Before You Go

- ☐ Is this a drop-in, or does it need registration?
 - ☐ What are the age rules, and does an adult stay?
 - ☐ Are materials included, and are they non-toxic?
 - ☐ Is the space loud?
 - ☐ Is there an accessible option?
 - ☐ What should we wear for messy play?
 - ☐ How long will we stay?
-

Related

Art museums and galleries ([profile 3](#)). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Live performances ([profile 18](#)). Recreation and community centers ([profile 26](#)). Parent Guide 03. [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2023, May 3). *The power of play: How fun and games help children thrive*.

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Grady, R. (2023). A scribble is never just a scribble: Art, story, and process. *Teaching Young Children*, 16(2). National Association for the Education of Young Children. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/winter2023/art-story-and-process>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *Protect your child's hearing*. <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/protect-your-childs-hearing>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. (2025, April 28). *How loud is too loud?* <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/how-loud-too-loud>

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E

CATEGORY 5 OF 7

Movement & Recreation

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Swimming, Pools & Splash Pads

SETTING

Indoor or outdoor pools, splash pads, and community or school pools.

TYPICAL TIME

30 minutes to a few hours.

COST

Free for many splash pads. Pools may charge admission or require a membership or program fee.

SENSORY LEVEL

Often high. Echo, splashing, and crowds are common. Quieter times exist.

What to Expect

Public pools usually have lifeguards, posted rules, depth markings, and set hours. Splash pads are shallow play areas with sprayers and no standing water. Many communities also offer swim lessons and family swim times.

Splash pads and pools differ in supervision and rules, so check the posted signs. Splash pads often have no lifeguard.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Getting comfortable in water:** splashing, floating, blowing bubbles.
- **Moving in new ways:** kicking, gliding, jumping.
- **Water play:** pouring, spraying, and chasing water jets.
- **Learning swim skills:** in lessons or with family.
- **Following rules:** pool signs, shallow and deep areas.
- **Playing with others:** taking turns, sharing space.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Splash pads and shallow water with an adult in the water within arm's reach. Short visits and warm water help.
3 to 5	Splash pads, shallow areas, and lessons. Life jackets may help weaker swimmers.
6 to 10	Learning strokes, trying deeper areas with supervision, and water games.
11 to 12	Swimming more independently. Some children join teams or lifeguard-style programs later.
13 to 17	Swimming for fitness or fun with friends, teams, or lessons.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can swim, play, or supervise. Warm-water or accessible pool sessions may suit some.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
posted age, depth, and swimming-ability rules; lifeguard presence; diaper and swim attire rules; and age requirements for adults or supervisors.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
supervision, drowning prevention, water quality and illness, slippery surfaces, accessible entry, and changing areas.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing in water with their children.
 - Swimming for exercise.
 - Cooling off in warm weather.
 - Being outdoors.
 - Learning or relearning to swim.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Splashing and playing together.
- Teaching or learning a skill.
- Making a regular swim habit.
- Playing water games.
- Cooling off together.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance) The AAP recommends a water watcher, which means close, constant, attentive supervision of children in or near water, even if they can swim and even when lifeguards are present. It says swim lessons are a layer of protection that can begin for many children starting at age 1, and do not replace other layers. It says floaties, water wings, and inflatable toys are not safe substitutes for life jackets (updated May 18, 2026). This AAP page covers home pools and hot tubs and does not address splash pads. The CDC says an adult should always be within arm's length of a child in or near water (January 27, 2026).

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, splash pads) The CDC says splash pads can spread germs and make users sick if the water is not adequately disinfected. It says swim diapers do not stop germs from getting into the water, advises taking children to the bathroom and checking diapers every hour, and says not to swallow splash pad water and to stay out of the water if sick with diarrhea (May 19, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from swimming or splash pad visits. This guide does not state that swimming lessons prevent drowning in every case or that a visit improves health or well-being.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Water play may offer active play and a cool break. What a child gets from it depends on the child, the setting, and the supervision.

Safety Note: Water

- An adult should be within arm's length of a young child in or near water, and a water watcher should stay focused, with phones away (CDC, AAP).
- Do not use floaties or inflatable toys in place of a life jacket (AAP).
- At splash pads, check diapers hourly, do not swallow the water, and stay out if sick with diarrhea (CDC).
- For more information, see the CDC pages on summer swim safety and on staying healthy at splash pads (links in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost: Many splash pads are free. Pools vary by admission, membership, and lessons. Ask about reduced rates.

Crowds and noise:	Hot days, weekends, and summer are busiest. Indoor pools echo.
Waiting:	Popular times may have capacity limits.
Transportation and parking:	Check access and distance from parking.
Accessibility:	Ask about ramps, lifts, zero-depth entry, and accessible changing areas.
Restrooms and changing:	Plan for locker rooms, showers, and family changing rooms.
Food and drink:	Many pools limit food. Bring water.
Weather and sun:	Outdoor pools and splash pads close for storms. Plan shade and sun protection.
Time:	Cold, tired children may need a break.
Age-related rules:	Pools may require adults with young children and set depth rules.

Ways to Adapt

Not yet swimming:	Stay in shallow areas. Ask about life jackets and lessons.
Young children:	Short visits and warm water.
Sensory needs:	Ask for a quieter session or bring ear protection.
Mobility:	Ask about lifts and accessible sessions.
Lower cost:	Free splash pads, community pool days, and library or recreation center passes.
Cold or fear:	Go slowly, and let a child watch first.
Mixed ages:	Choose an area with shallow and deeper water.
At home:	A sprinkler or small basin with an adult within reach.

Before You Go

- ☐ Is there a lifeguard, and what are the rules?
 - ☐ What depth and age rules apply?
 - ☐ Do we need a swim diaper or specific swim attire?
 - ☐ Where are the changing rooms and restrooms?
 - ☐ Is there a quiet time or accessible session?
 - ☐ How will we keep an adult within arm's reach of young children?
 - ☐ What is the plan if the weather changes?
-

Related

Beaches, lakes, and rivers ([profile 8](#)). Water parks ([profile 14](#)). Recreation and community centers ([profile 26](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026, May 18). *Pool dangers: Drowning prevention when not swimming time*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Pool-Dangers-Drowning-Prevention-When-Not-Swimming-Time.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, May 19). *What you can do to stay healthy at splash pads*. <https://cdc.gov/healthy-swimming/safety/stay-healthy-at-splash-pads.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026, January 27). *Summer swim safety*. <https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/prevention/summer-swim-safety.html>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Skating

SETTING

Indoor rinks, outdoor rinks, paths, and smooth paved surfaces.

TYPICAL TIME

One to two hours.

COST

Varies. Rinks charge admission and rentals. Paths are free.

SENSORY LEVEL

Moderate to high at rinks. Music, noise, and crowds are common.

What to Expect

Skating includes roller skating, in-line skating, and ice skating. Rinks offer rentals, family sessions, and lessons. Outdoor skating uses paths or paved areas.

Many rinks have skate aids for beginners and set sessions by age. Falls are common at the beginning.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Balance:** standing, gliding, stopping.
- **Trying again after falling.**
- **Moving with music.**
- **Following rink rules:** direction, speed, and space.
- **Learning a skill step by step.**
- **Skating with others.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Usually too early for independent skating. Some rinks offer sessions with an adult.
3 to 5	Beginners with aids, a wall, and an adult close by.
6 to 10	Learning balance, stopping, and turning.
11 to 12	Gaining confidence, speed, and control.
13 to 17	Skating with friends, or trying skating sports.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can skate, coach, or watch. A bench near the rink helps.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

session times, rental rules, helmet or gear policies, and age or adult requirements.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

protective gear, falls, crowded sessions, surface condition, and accessibility.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Skating alongside their children.
 - Learning a new skill.
 - Music and a social setting.
 - Exercise.
 - Nostalgia.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Learning together.
- Holding hands or skating in a line.
- Laughing about falls.
- A family session as a tradition.
- Cheering each other.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

In the sources reviewed, I did not find a current source I could open on skating safety, and the AAP's in-line skating page is from 2004. This profile therefore makes no safety claims from a source. The AAP's HealthyChildren.org site has information on skating and protective gear.

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from skating. This guide does not state that skating improves fitness, balance, or confidence.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Skating may offer active play and a chance to learn a new skill. What a child gets from it depends on the child, the setting, and the support.

Safety Note: Gear

- Check that skates and any protective gear fit. This is a practical suggestion, not from a source.
- For information on protective gear and where to skate, see the AAP's HealthyChildren.org website (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Admission, rentals, and lessons add up. Some rinks have family or off-peak sessions.
Crowds and noise:	Public sessions can be crowded and loud. Beginner or family sessions may be calmer.
Waiting:	Skate rental lines can be long. Arrive early.
Transportation and parking:	Check parking.
Accessibility:	Ask about rink entry, benches, skate aids, and adaptive equipment.
Restrooms and changing:	Check availability. Ice rinks are cold.
Food and drink:	Snack bars are common. Outside food may be limited.
Time:	Skating is tiring. Short sessions are fine.

Age-related rules:	Rinks may require adults to skate with young children, or have separate sessions.
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Weather:	Outdoor skating depends on conditions.
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Ways to Adapt

Beginners:	Use the wall, a skate aid, and short sessions.
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Fear of falling:	Practice falling slowly, in gear.
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Sensory needs:	Ask about quieter sessions or off-peak times.
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Mobility:	Ask about benches, adaptive skates, and chairs.
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Lower cost:	Use outdoor paths, community days, or borrow skates.
-------------	--

Warmth:	Wear layers and gloves on ice.
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Mixed ages:	Take turns skating and resting.
-------------	---------------------------------

At home:	Slide in socks on a smooth floor, with care.
----------	--

Before You Go

- ☐ What are the session times and rules?
 - ☐ Are helmets and pads available or required?
 - ☐ Do young children need an adult beside them?
 - ☐ Are there skate aids?
 - ☐ Is it a quiet session?
 - ☐ What should we wear?
 - ☐ Where can we rest?
-

Related

Biking ([profile 23](#)). Recreation and community centers ([profile 26](#)). Recreational sports ([profile 25](#)).
[Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). *HealthyChildren.org* [Home page]. <https://www.healthychildren.org>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Biking

SETTING

Paths, trails, parks, quiet streets, and driveways. Indoor or stationary options exist.

TYPICAL TIME

20 minutes to a few hours.

COST

Low after the equipment. Bikes, helmets, and repairs cost money. Some places offer rentals or loaners.

SENSORY LEVEL

Low to moderate. Traffic and crowds on shared paths can add noise.

What to Expect

Biking can mean a tricycle on a driveway, a balance bike in a park, a ride on a trail, or a family ride on a path. Some families use a trailer, seat, or cargo bike for younger children. Many communities have bike paths, bike-share programs, rentals, and community rides.

A helmet that fits is part of every ride.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Balance and steering:** scooting, pedaling, turning.
- **Practicing:** repeating until it feels easy.
- **Exploring a route:** parks, paths, and neighborhoods.
- **Learning rules:** stopping, looking, signaling.
- **Setting a goal:** a ride to a destination.
- **Taking care of equipment.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Riding in a seat or trailer, if the equipment is made for it and fits. Walking with a push trike.
3 to 5	Tricycles, balance bikes, and first pedal bikes, on driveways or paths away from the street.
6 to 10	Learning to ride, building skills, and riding on paths with an adult.
11 to 12	Riding more independently. Maturity and traffic conditions decide where.
13 to 17	Biking to places, with friends, or for sport.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can ride alongside. E-bikes, trikes, and rentals can help.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
bike path rules, rental policies, helmet requirements, and age limits for seats or trailers.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
helmets, supervision, traffic, visibility, and bike fit and maintenance.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Riding with their children.
 - Exercise and outdoor time.
 - Exploring a place.
 - Getting somewhere without a car.
 - Sharing a skill.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Riding a route together.
- Teaching and learning to ride.
- Stopping for a snack or a view.
- Making a regular ride.
- Cheering a first ride.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(*Guidance*) The AAP advises buying a helmet approved by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, starting helmet use with the first tricycle or bike, and requiring it on every ride. It says young children should ride only with adult supervision and off the street. It advises that letting older children ride on streets depend on traffic conditions, maturity, and whether they understand and follow rules of the road. It says never to ride at dusk or in the dark, and to check tires, brakes, and seat and handlebar heights at least once a year (updated August 11, 2022).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from family biking. This guide does not state that biking improves fitness or family bonds, and it does not state a minimum age for riding.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Biking may offer active time outdoors and a way to explore. What a family gets from it depends on the route, the weather, and the people.

Safety Note: Helmets and Roads

- Wear a CPSC-approved helmet on every ride, starting with the first tricycle or bike (AAP).
- Young children should ride off the street with adult supervision (AAP).
- Ride with traffic, stop and look both ways before entering a street, and avoid riding at dusk or in the dark (AAP).
- For more information, see the AAP page in Sources.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	A bike, helmet, and maintenance cost money. Used bikes, loaner programs, and rentals can help.
Crowds and noise:	Shared paths can be busy on weekends.
Waiting:	Rental shops may have lines.
Transportation and parking:	You may need a rack or trailer to reach a trail.
Accessibility:	Adaptive bikes, trikes, and tandem bikes exist. Ask rental shops or community programs.

Restrooms and changing:	Not every path has restrooms. Plan stops.
Food and drink:	Bring water and snacks.
Weather and sun:	Heat, rain, and short daylight matter.
Time:	Young children tire quickly. Plan short rides.
Age-related rules:	Rentals and seats may have age or weight limits.

Ways to Adapt

Learning to ride:	Use a flat, open area. Take breaks.
Fear:	Start slow and celebrate small steps.
Sensory needs:	Choose quiet paths and plan breaks.
Mobility:	Ask about adaptive bikes and trikes.
Lower cost:	Used bikes, loaner programs, and community rides.
No safe place nearby:	Visit a park or path with a car or transit.
Mixed ages:	Pick a short loop. Let faster riders do extra laps.
Weather:	Try a stationary bike or a scooter.

Before You Go

- ☐ Does everyone have a helmet that fits?
- ☐ Is the bike the right size, and are the brakes and tires fine?
- ☐ Where will we ride, and is it off the street?
- ☐ Who is supervising the youngest riders?
- ☐ How far and how long will we ride?
- ☐ What are the path rules?
- ☐ Do we have water, snacks, and a plan for breaks?

Related

Skating ([profile 22](#)). Nature trails and walks ([profile 7](#)). Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Exploring a different neighborhood (profile 29). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2022, August 11). *Your child's first tricycle or bike: Important safety rules*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/your-childs-first-tricycle-or-bike-teaching-them-to-ride-safely.aspx>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Bowling & Miniature Golf

SETTING

Indoor bowling alleys and indoor or outdoor miniature golf courses.

TYPICAL TIME

One to two hours.

COST

Low to moderate. Priced per game, per person, or per hour. Shoe rental is common for bowling.

SENSORY LEVEL

Moderate to high. Bowling alleys can be loud. Mini golf is usually quieter.

What to Expect

Bowling uses lanes, balls, and pins. Many alleys offer lighter balls, bumpers, and ramps for young children. Miniature golf is a course of small holes with obstacles, often with a theme.

Both are turn-taking games that mixed ages can play together.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Aiming and rolling or putting.**
- **Taking turns.**
- **Keeping score:** counting and adding.
- **Trying again.**
- **Winning, losing, and cheering others.**
- **Following lane or course rules.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Usually watching. A ramp or a push may be possible. Noise may be too much.
3 to 5	Using bumpers, light balls, and short putts, with an adult helping.
6 to 10	Playing with some help, learning scoring.
11 to 12	Playing independently, keeping score.
13 to 17	Playing with friends or family leagues.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can play, coach, or keep score. Benches and rails help.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

shoe rental, ball weight and size options, bumper availability, age or adult requirements, and course rules.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

heavy equipment, slippery floors, noise, accessible lanes or holes, and crowds.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing a game with their children.
 - Friendly competition.
 - A low-effort social outing.
 - Nostalgia.
 - A break from screens.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Taking turns and cheering.
- Playing on teams.
- Laughing at misses.
- Celebrating a birthday.
- A regular family night.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	In the sources reviewed, I did not find independent research or government guidance on bowling or miniature golf. This profile therefore contains no research claims.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	This guide does not state that these activities improve coordination, math skills, or family relationships.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	Both activities give a group a shared game with easy turns. What a family gets from them depends on the people and the venue.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

All items on this profile are practical considerations. I did not find a source.

Cost:	Per game, per hour, or by package. Shoe rental may be extra. Ask about family or off-peak rates.
Crowds and noise:	Bowling is louder at weekends and during leagues.
Waiting:	Lanes or courses can have waits on busy days. Reserve if possible.
Transportation and parking:	Most have parking.
Accessibility:	Ask about ramps, lighter balls, accessible lanes, and course layouts.
Restrooms and changing:	Check availability.
Food and drink:	Many have food. Check allergy options.
Weather:	Outdoor mini golf depends on weather.
Age-related rules:	Some require adults with young children.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Use bumpers, ramps, and light balls.
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Sensory needs:	Ask about quieter times or lanes away from music.
Mobility:	Ask about ramps, rails, and accessible holes.
Mixed ages:	Play without strict scoring.
Lower cost:	Off-peak rates, shorter games, or a home version.
Competition:	Play as a team or against a family score.
At home:	Roll a ball at plastic cups, or build a mini golf course.

Before You Go

-
- ☐ Is the noise level okay for us?
 - ☐ Do we need shoes or socks?
 - ☐ Are bumpers or light balls available?
 - ☐ How long is a game or round?
 - ☐ Do we need a reservation?
 - ☐ Is there an accessible option?
 - ☐ What is the food policy?
-

Related

Family entertainment centers ([profile 15](#)). Family game nights ([profile 28](#)). Recreational sports ([profile 25](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

No sources were found that met this guide's standard for this profile. Venue websites are the best source for current rules.

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Recreational Sports (Playing and Watching)

SETTING

Parks, fields, courts, gyms, rinks, schools, and stadiums.

TYPICAL TIME

One practice or game, up to a season. Watching a game is a few hours.

COST

Varies. Pick-up play can be free. Leagues may charge fees plus equipment. Watching can range from free to high.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Games can be loud and crowded. Practice can be quieter.

What to Expect

Recreational sports cover playing in a league, joining a pick-up game, or playing in the yard. They also include watching a sibling, a school team, or a professional game.

Community leagues, parks and recreation departments, schools, and clubs run programs. Programs differ in how competitive they are.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Basic movement:** running, throwing, catching, jumping.
- **Learning rules and skills.**
- **Being on a team:** cooperating, taking turns.
- **Winning, losing, and trying again.**
- **Following a coach.**
- **Watching and cheering.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Active play with balls and movement games. Organized sports are usually too early.
3 to 5	Foundational movement, short sessions, play, and little competition.
6 to 10	Simple organized sports, learning skills, and teamwork.
11 to 12	More complex sports that need teamwork and strategy. Focus on skills and fun.
13 to 17	Playing for school, club, or friends, or taking a different role such as coaching or officiating.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can play, coach, referee, or watch. Adult leagues, walking sports, and cheering are options.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
league age groups, registration, fees, practice schedules, equipment rules, and coach requirements.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
injuries, concussions, heat, overuse, coaching, equipment, and accessible sports.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing a sport they enjoy.
 - Seeing a child learn.
 - Meeting other families.
 - Coaching or volunteering.
 - Cheering at games.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Practicing together in the yard.
- Cheering at games.
- Carpooling and sharing snacks.
- Trying a new sport together.
- Following a team together.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	<i>(Guidance)</i> The AAP says most children lack the basic motor skills for organized sports before age 6, and recommends foundational movement for ages 2 to 5, with brief instruction, plenty of playtime, and little competition. It says most children can handle simple organized sports by age 6 and are ready for more complex sports with teamwork and strategy by ages 10 to 12. It advises choosing programs that emphasize involvement, variety, and enjoyment over strict rules and winning, and cautions against early single-sport specialization and intensive year-round training because of overuse injury, mental stress, and burnout. It advises asking other families about a program and observing it before joining (updated June 28, 2024; based on 2011 AAP handouts).
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The CDC recommends 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for ages 6 to 17 (reviewed July 3, 2024). This guide does not state that a sport meets that recommendation. The CDC’s HEADS UP program provides concussion information for parents, coaches, and athletes (reviewed July 28, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from recreational sports. This guide does not state that sports improve health, character, or school performance.
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POTENTIAL BENEFIT	Sports may offer active play, skills, and time with others. What a child gets depends on the child, the program, and the coach.
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Safety Note: Injury and Concussion

- Be cautious with early single-sport specialization and intensive year-round training (AAP).
- Learn the signs of concussion and what to do if one is suspected (CDC HEADS UP).
- For more information, see the CDC HEADS UP page and the AAP page in Sources.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Fees, uniforms, equipment, travel, and tournaments. Ask about fee waivers and used equipment.
Crowds and noise:	Games can be loud. Fields can be crowded.

Waiting:	Practice and games take time. Weather delays happen.
Transportation and parking:	Practices may be across town. Carpooling can help.
Accessibility:	Ask about adaptive and inclusive leagues.
Restrooms and changing:	Fields may lack facilities. Check.
Food and drink:	Bring water. Check league snack rules and allergies.
Time:	Seasons can take many evenings and weekends.
Age-related rules:	Leagues set age groups. Some require birth certificates or a physical.
Weather and heat:	Plan shade and water.

Ways to Adapt

Not ready for a team:	Play in the yard or a park.
Competitive pressure:	Choose a recreational league focused on fun.
Sensory needs:	Ask about the coach, noise, and breaks.
Mobility or disability:	Ask about adaptive and inclusive programs.
Lower cost:	Park pick-up games, school teams, used gear, and fee waivers.
Mixed ages:	Play modified games in the yard.
Watching:	Attend a local game, school game, or practice.

Before You Go

- ☐ How competitive is the program?
 - ☐ What are the ages, fees, and schedule?
 - ☐ Who is the coach, and what training do they have?
 - ☐ What is the injury and concussion policy?
 - ☐ What equipment is needed?
 - ☐ How will we get to practices?
 - ☐ Is the program fun for our child?
-

Related

Skating ([profile 22](#)). Recreation and community centers ([profile 26](#)). Swimming, pools, and splash pads ([profile 21](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024, June 28). *Is your child ready for sports?* HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sports/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Ready-for-Sports.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, July 28). *HEADS UP*. <https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 3). *Physical activity guidelines for school-aged children and adolescents*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Recreation & Community Centers

SETTING

Indoor buildings with gyms, pools, classrooms, and activity rooms. Often run by a city, county, nonprofit, or faith group.

TYPICAL TIME

One hour to a day.
Programs run weekly or seasonally.

COST

Often low. Some are free. Others charge memberships or program fees. Fee assistance is sometimes available.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Gyms can be loud. Classrooms and open rooms can be quieter.

What to Expect

Recreation and community centers offer drop-in time, classes, sports, camps, and events. Many have gyms, pools, fitness rooms, and rooms for arts and meetings. Programs often include youth, older adult, and inclusive offerings.

Offerings differ by community. Check your local center.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Trying a new activity:** sport, art, dance, or music.
- **Meeting children and adults** outside school.
- **Using a gym or pool.**
- **Joining a group or camp.**
- **Following a routine.**
- **Helping at events.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Parent-and-child classes, open play, and story or music times, where offered.
3 to 5	Preschool programs, open gym, and short classes.
6 to 10	After-school programs, sports, arts, and swim classes.
11 to 12	Sports, clubs, and teen nights where offered.
13 to 17	Teen programs, volunteering, leadership roles, and work experience.
Adults and multigenerational	Adult fitness, senior programs, and classes. Some centers offer multigenerational events.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

membership or residency rules, registration windows, age groups, fees, fee assistance, and adult supervision requirements.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

supervision, program safety, accessible facilities, and check-in procedures.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Classes and fitness.
 - Time while children are in a program.
 - Meeting neighbors.
 - Low-cost activities.
 - Volunteering or teaching.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Taking a class together.
- Using the gym or pool.
- Attending a community event.
- Meeting other families.
- Making a regular visit.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	In the sources reviewed, I did not find a current source I could open on what recreation centers offer. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the national organization for park and recreation agencies, and its website has information for families.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from using recreation centers. This guide does not state that they improve health or community connection, and it does not describe any particular center.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A recreation center may offer a low-cost place to be active and meet others. What a family gets depends on the center and the programs.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Memberships, program fees, and drop-in fees vary. Ask about resident rates and fee assistance.
Crowds and noise:	Busy after school and in the evening.
Waiting:	Popular classes fill quickly. Registration windows matter.
Transportation and parking:	Check public transit and parking.
Accessibility:	Ask about accessible entrances, programs, and sensory-friendly times.
Restrooms and changing:	Most have locker rooms and family changing areas.
Food and drink:	Policies vary.
Time:	Programs run on a schedule. Drop-in may be limited.
Age-related rules:	Many programs have age groups. Some have adult-supervision rules.

Ways to Adapt

Cost:	Ask about fee assistance, scholarships, and free hours.
Sensory needs:	Ask about quieter times.
Mobility:	Ask about accessible facilities and adaptive programs.
Not sure what to try:	Ask for a tour or a trial visit.
Limited transportation:	Look for programs near home or at a school.
Mixed ages:	Look for family classes or open gym times.
Language:	Ask for materials or staff in your language.

Before You Go

-
- ☐ What programs does the center offer for our children's ages?
 - ☐ What does it cost, and is fee assistance available?
 - ☐ How do we register?
 - ☐ What are the hours and drop-in times?
 - ☐ How is supervision handled?
 - ☐ Is the building accessible?
 - ☐ Can we take a tour first?
-

Related

Swimming, pools, and splash pads ([profile 21](#)). Recreational sports ([profile 25](#)). Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Making art and music ([profile 20](#)). Parent Guide 03. [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

National Recreation and Park Association. (n.d.). *National Recreation and Park Association* [Home page]. <https://www.nrpa.org>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.



CATEGORY 6 OF 7

Everyday Family Experiences

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Cooking Together, Trying New Foods & Eating Out

SETTING

Home kitchens, community kitchens, restaurants, food trucks, markets, and potlucks.

TYPICAL TIME

Fifteen minutes for a simple task, up to a few hours for a meal.

COST

Varies. Cooking at home can be low-cost. Eating out ranges from low to high.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Kitchens have smells, heat, and noise. Restaurants can be loud or quiet.

What to Expect

This profile covers three related experiences. Cooking together means children and adults preparing food. Trying new foods means tasting something unfamiliar, at home or out. Eating out means a meal at a restaurant, food truck, cafe, or community event.

Families differ in what they eat and how. This guide does not define or rank any food, diet, or tradition.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Helping in the kitchen:** washing, stirring, measuring, and setting the table.
- **Following steps:** reading a recipe and counting.
- **Using the senses:** smelling, touching, and tasting.
- **Trying new foods:** at their own pace.
- **Choosing:** a recipe, a vegetable, or a menu item.
- **Learning family recipes** and food traditions.
- **Restaurant manners and ordering:** asking for what they want.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Watching, touching safe foods, and tasting soft foods. Messy eating is common. Close adult supervision.
3 to 5	Washing produce, stirring, mixing, and pouring with help. Children this age are often choosy.
6 to 10	Measuring, cracking eggs, simple recipes, and ordering for themselves.
11 to 12	Following recipes, using more tools with supervision, and planning a meal.
13 to 17	Cooking a meal for the family, trying cuisines with friends, and learning food skills.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults and elders can share family recipes. Easy-to-chew foods, seating, and menus in large print can matter.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

restaurant policies on high chairs, kids' menus, and outside food; classes and community kitchens may set age and supervision rules.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

food safety, allergies, hot surfaces, knives, and accessible seating and menus.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Passing on family recipes.
 - A relaxed way to spend time with children.
 - Sharing a meal they have made.
 - Trying a new cuisine.
 - Having help with dinner.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Preparing a meal together.
- Sharing family recipes and stories.
- Trying something new at the same time.
- Eating together without screens.
- Celebrating a meal or a tradition.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, trying new foods) The AAP says choosy eating is common, especially at ages 2 to 4, and is usually short-lived. It advises eating family meals together and showing willingness to try new foods, because children often copy parents and siblings. It advises regular meal and snack times, seated and free of devices, letting children choose from what is offered, and offering a rejected food again. It states that “it can take children 15–20 tries to like a new food.” It advises against forcing a child to eat. It says preschoolers are more likely to eat what they help prepare (updated June 21, 2024).

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE (GUIDANCE, COOKING WITH CHILDREN)

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics lists tasks by age. For ages 2 to 3: washing fruits and vegetables, wiping tables, and snapping green beans, with close adult supervision. For ages 9 to 12: boiling pasta, using the microwave, following recipes, and baking, with adult supervision, once children can show they follow basic kitchen rules. It advises washing hands with soap before and after handling food, keeping raw meat separate from cooked and ready-to-eat foods, and refrigerating leftovers within two hours, or one hour if above 90°F. It says young cooks need supervision (published March 21, 2022; reviewed September 28, 2026).

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, food safety) The CDC recommends four steps: clean, separate, cook, and chill (November 24, 2025).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from cooking together or eating out. This guide does not state that cooking improves nutrition, eating habits, or family relationships. It does not recommend any food, diet, or restaurant.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Cooking and trying foods together may offer shared time and a chance to learn skills. What a family gets from it depends on the children, the foods, and the day.

Safety Note: Kitchen and Food

- Wash hands with soap before and after handling food, and keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, CDC).
- Young cooks need supervision (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics).
- Check for food allergies before you cook or order. This is a practical suggestion, not from a source.
- For more information, see the CDC page on preventing food poisoning (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Cooking at home can cost less than eating out. Restaurants vary widely. Ask about kids' menus.
Crowds and noise:	Restaurants can be loud at peak hours.
Waiting:	Restaurants may have waits. Young children may find waiting hard.
Transportation and parking:	Check parking and access.
Accessibility:	Ask about accessible seating, restrooms, and menus. Kitchen tools can be adapted.
Restrooms and changing:	Check for family restrooms and changing tables.
Food and drink:	Allergies and dietary needs shape choices. Ask about ingredients.
Time:	Cooking takes longer with children. Choose simple recipes.
Mess:	Spills are part of cooking with children.
Age-related rules:	Classes may set ages. Restaurants may have policies on strollers and outside food.

Ways to Adapt

Choosy eaters:	Offer a food the child already likes alongside a new one, and avoid pressure (AAP).
Young children:	Give a small job such as washing produce or stirring.
Sensory needs:	Some children dislike textures, smells, or noise. Let them watch or take breaks.
Allergies or diets:	Plan around them. Read labels. Ask restaurants.
Mobility:	Use a seat at the counter, adaptive tools, or pre-cut ingredients.
Lower cost:	Cook a simple meal at home, share a potluck, or try a food from your own pantry.

Limited kitchen: Choose no-cook recipes, such as sandwiches or fruit plates.

Mixed ages: Give each person a task that suits them.

Before You Go

- ☐ Does anyone have allergies or dietary needs?
 - ☐ What can each child safely do?
 - ☐ Is the recipe simple enough for the time we have?
 - ☐ Who is supervising the youngest cook?
 - ☐ What is the plan if a child will not try the food?
 - ☐ If eating out: is the noise level okay, and is there a kids' menu?
 - ☐ Do we have a plan for cleanup?
-

Related

Picnics ([profile 11](#)). Family game nights ([profile 28](#)). Time with family and friends ([profile 31](#)). Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). Exploring a different neighborhood ([profile 29](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2024, June 21). *How do I help my picky eater try more healthy foods?* HealthyChildren.org. <https://healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/How-Do-I-Help-My-Picky-Eater-Try-More-Foods.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, November 24). *Preventing food poisoning*. <https://www.cdc.gov/food-safety/prevention/index.html>

Ellis, E. (2022, March 21). *Teaching kids to cook*. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. <https://www.eatright.org/homefoodsafety/four-steps/cook/teaching-kids-to-cook>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Family Game Nights (Including Video Games Together)

SETTING

Home, a friend's or relative's home, a library, or a community center. Online games can be played from different places.

TYPICAL TIME

Thirty minutes to a few hours.

COST

Low. Games can be bought, borrowed from a library, or made at home. Video games and consoles cost more.

SENSORY LEVEL

Low to moderate. Lively games can be loud. Screens add light and sound.

What to Expect

A game night is a planned time to play a game together. Examples include board games, card games, puzzles, charades, trivia, and video games. Some families play on a regular night, and some play when they are together.

Video games can be played on a console, computer, phone, or tablet, and can be played side by side or online. Games vary widely in content, and rules for time and spending are set by each family.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Learning rules:** following steps and agreeing on them.
- **Taking turns and waiting.**
- **Strategy and problem-solving.**
- **Winning, losing, and trying again.**
- **Working as a team** in cooperative games.
- **Choosing a game** and explaining it to others.
- **Keeping score:** counting and adding.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Simple turn-taking games, matching, and playing with an adult. Small pieces are a choking risk.
3 to 5	Short games with few rules, such as matching games and simple board games. Losing can be hard.
6 to 10	Longer board games, card games, and early video games with an adult.
11 to 12	Strategy games, team games, and online games with friends. Many want to choose.
13 to 17	Games with friends and family, longer games, and online play. Content and online contacts matter.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults and elders can teach classic games. Larger pieces, good lighting, and comfortable seats help.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

for video games, age ratings, platform rules, and online-play rules; libraries may lend games.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

small pieces, game content, online contacts, in-game spending, and accessible game formats.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Playing together.
 - Competing in a friendly way.
 - A screen-free evening, or a shared screen-based one.
 - Sharing games from their own childhood.
 - Laughing together.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Teaching each other a game.
- Playing on teams.
- Inventing house rules.
- Having a regular night.
- Cheering each other.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(Guidance, media use) The AAP says families should create a media plan that suits their household and revise it often as children grow, including every family member. It suggests screen-free zones such as mealtimes, homework time, and the time before bed, leaving time for offline activities such as games, and using one screen at a time. It advises using apps and shows that teach, inspire creativity, and encourage social connection, avoiding content heavy with ads or with violent or age-inappropriate material, and using parental controls for time limits, downloads, contacts, and purchases (updated January 20, 2026).

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE (PROGRAM INFORMATION, VIDEO GAME RATINGS)

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) says its system has three parts: rating categories, content descriptors, and interactive elements. It uses more than 30 content descriptors to communicate what is in a game. It says parental controls can manage in-game spending and block games by rating. This is the rating organization describing its own system. This guide does not describe individual ratings.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(AAP) The AAP's play article says parents' and caregivers' presence and attention enriches children, and recommends regular reading, singing, and unstructured play with children (updated May 3, 2023).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from family game nights. This guide does not state that games or video games improve learning, behavior, or family relationships, and it does not state a safe amount of screen time.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A game night may offer shared time and a way to practice turn-taking. What a family gets from it depends on the game and the people.

Safety Note: Video Games

- Check a game's rating and content descriptors before buying, and use parental controls for time, downloads, contacts, and purchases (AAP, ESRB).
- Small pieces in board games can be a choking risk for young children. This is a practical suggestion, not from a source.
- For more information, see the AAP and ESRB pages in Sources.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Many games are low-cost. Libraries may lend games. Video games, consoles, and in-game purchases cost more.
Crowds and noise:	Lively games can get loud.
Waiting:	Longer games can be hard for young children. Choose short games.
Transportation and parking:	Rarely an issue at home.
Accessibility:	Look for large-print cards, tactile pieces, adaptive controllers, and games that do not depend on speed.
Restrooms and changing:	Not usually an issue at home.
Food and drink:	Plan snacks. Keep food away from game pieces.
Time:	Set a start and end time. Short games work for young children.
Age-related rules:	Games list recommended ages. Video games have ratings.
Competition:	Some children find losing hard. Choose cooperative games.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Choose short games and a simple rule set.
Losing is hard:	Try cooperative games or teams.
Sensory needs:	Choose quiet games and dim lights, or limit screen time.
Mixed ages:	Use teams, handicaps, or games of chance.
Mobility or vision:	Use large pieces, a table at a comfortable height, or adaptive controllers.
Lower cost:	Borrow games, play cards, or make your own.
Screen-free:	Try charades, drawing games, or puzzles.
Video games:	Play together, set time limits, and talk about content.

Before You Go

- ☐ Which game suits everyone's ages?
 - ☐ How long will we play?
 - ☐ Who explains the rules?
 - ☐ What if someone does not want to play?
 - ☐ For video games: what is the rating, and what are the online settings?
 - ☐ Are there small pieces to watch for?
 - ☐ How will we end the night?
-

Related

Family entertainment centers ([profile 15](#)). Bowling and miniature golf ([profile 24](#)). Time with family and friends ([profile 31](#)). At-home themed experiences ([profile 30](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2023, May 3). *The power of play: How fun and games help children thrive*.

HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/The-Power-of-Play-How-Fun-and-Games-Help-Children-Thrive.aspx>

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026, January 20). *How to make a family media use plan*. HealthyChildren.org.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx>

Entertainment Software Rating Board. (n.d.). *Ratings guide for parents*. <https://www.esrb.org/parents/ratings/>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Exploring a Different Neighborhood

SETTING

Streets, shops, parks, markets, libraries, and public spaces in another part of your city or town.

TYPICAL TIME

One hour to a day.

COST

Low. Transit, parking, and food are the main costs.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Busy streets are stimulating. Quiet streets and parks are calmer.

What to Expect

Exploring a different neighborhood means visiting a part of your city or region you do not usually go to. You might walk a main street, visit a library or park, eat at a local shop, or look at public art.

This is a visit as a guest. Neighborhoods are people's homes and workplaces, so this profile suggests respectful curiosity. It does not rate any area.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Noticing differences and similarities:** buildings, signs, food, and music.
- **Reading maps** and planning a route.
- **Walking and using transit.**
- **Meeting people:** shopkeepers, librarians, and neighbors.
- **Trying new foods and places.**
- **Choosing a stop:** a park, shop, or mural.
- **Asking questions.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Riding in a stroller or carrier, with a sense of new sights and sounds. Short outings and breaks.
3 to 5	Short walks, a park or playground, and a snack. Children may ask many questions.
6 to 10	Helping choose a route, reading signs, and counting stops.
11 to 12	Helping with maps and transit. Some want more independence.
13 to 17	Exploring with friends or family, planning an outing, and using public transit.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults and elders can share local history. Seating, flat routes, and restrooms matter.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

businesses and parks set their own rules; some venues require reservations or have age policies.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

traffic, getting lost, weather, accessible routes, transit, and respect for residents.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Learning about their own city.
 - Local food and shops.
 - Walking together.
 - Finding places they did not know.
 - A change from routine.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing a place together.
- Walking and talking.
- Sharing a snack from a local shop.
- Making a map of favorite stops.
- Planning the next outing.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	(<i>Guidance</i>) The CDC recommends 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for ages 6 to 17 (reviewed July 3, 2024). A walk is one way activity can happen. This guide does not state that a neighborhood walk meets the recommendation.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from exploring neighborhoods. This guide does not state that exploring improves learning, community connection, or well-being, and it does not describe or rank any neighborhood.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A visit may offer new sights and conversations. What a family gets from it depends on the place and the people.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Practical considerations. I did not find a source.

Cost:	Mostly transit, parking, and food. Many places are free.
Crowds and noise:	Main streets, markets, and festivals are busier.
Waiting:	Transit and restaurants may have waits.
Transportation and parking:	Check transit routes, schedules, and parking. Street parking has rules.
Accessibility:	Check sidewalks, curb cuts, transit access, and restrooms before going.
Restrooms and changing:	Public restrooms can be limited. Libraries, parks, and cafes may help.
Food and drink:	Bring water and snacks. Try a local place.
Time:	Plan stops and breaks. Short visits are fine.
Safety:	Use usual street safety. Agree on a meeting point and keep young children close.
Respect:	Ask before taking photos of people. Follow posted rules.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Keep stops short and plan a snack.
Sensory needs:	Choose quiet streets or parks. Plan breaks.
Mobility:	Choose flat routes and check access.
Limited transportation:	Look for a neighborhood reachable by one bus or on foot, or explore your own block as a visitor.
Lower cost:	Walk, use free places, and bring a snack.
Mixed ages:	Let each person choose one stop.
At home:	Look at a map, photos, or a library book about the area first.

Before You Go

-
- ☐ Where are we going, and how will we get there?
 - ☐ What will we do when we arrive?
 - ☐ Are the routes accessible?
 - ☐ Where are restrooms and places to rest?
 - ☐ How will we stay together?
 - ☐ How will we be respectful of the people and places we visit?
 - ☐ What is our plan if the weather changes?
-

Related

Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). Festivals, community celebrations, and seasonal traditions ([profile 19](#)). Libraries (profile 4). Parks and playgrounds ([profile 6](#)). Biking ([profile 23](#)). Parent Guide 09. [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 3). *Physical activity guidelines for school-aged children and adolescents*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-education/guidelines/>

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

At-Home Themed Experiences

SETTING

Home, yard, porch, or building.

TYPICAL TIME

Thirty minutes to a day.

COST

Low. Use what you have.

SENSORY LEVEL

Low to moderate. You control lights, sound, and pace.

What to Expect

An at-home themed experience is a planned activity at home built around a theme. Examples are a movie night with snacks, an indoor camping night, a pretend restaurant, a cultural food night, a space day, a spa day, a science experiment day, or a backyard picnic.

It can be a one-time event or a recurring tradition. It needs no travel and can be adjusted to the family.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Pretending and role-play:** being a chef, an astronaut, or a camper.
- **Learning about a topic or culture** through books, food, or music.
- **Planning and making:** decorations, menus, or costumes.
- **Choosing a theme.**
- **Using imagination** with ordinary objects.
- **Helping set up and clean up.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Simple sensory play, such as a bin of water or a blanket tent, with an adult close by.
3 to 5	Dress-up, pretend play, and simple crafts. Children this age often lead the story.
6 to 10	Planning a theme, making invitations or decorations, and pretend play with friends.
11 to 12	Creating more complex themes, scripts, or games. Some prefer a themed night with friends.
13 to 17	Planning a night for family or friends, cooking a themed meal, or hosting a movie night.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults and elders can share stories, foods, and traditions that fit the theme.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
none, apart from household rules and any building rules for noise or fire (for example, candles).

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
supervision, small items, food allergies, fire and electrical safety, and noise.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Low-cost fun.
- Creativity.
- Sharing traditions.
- Time together without travel.
- A break from routine.

What Families Might Experience Together

- Planning and preparing together.
- Getting dressed up.
- Eating themed food.
- Telling stories.
- Making a tradition.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(AAP) The AAP's play article says dress-up and imaginary play encourage creativity and build negotiation, communication, and language skills. It says parents' and caregivers' presence and attention enriches children, and recommends regular reading, singing, and unstructured play (updated May 3, 2023). The AAP's media plan page suggests designating screen-free times and leaving time for offline activities such as games and hobbies (updated January 20, 2026).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from at-home themed activities. This guide does not state that they improve creativity, language, or family relationships.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

A themed night may offer shared time and a way to use imagination. What a family gets from it depends on the theme and the people.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Low. Use items from home, library books, or borrowed items.
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Crowds and noise:	You control the setting. Plan quiet and active times.
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Waiting:	Preparation can take time. Let children help.
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Transportation and parking:	None.
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Accessibility:	Adjust for mobility, vision, and hearing needs. Provide seating.
-----------------------	--

Restrooms and changing:	At home.
--------------------------------	----------

Food and drink:	Plan around allergies and dietary needs.
------------------------	--

Time:	Keep it short for young children. Stop when interest fades.
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Safety:	Avoid candles or heat near children. Keep small items away from young children. Supervise.
----------------	--

Age-related rules:	None.
--------------------	-------

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Keep the theme simple and the time short.
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Sensory needs:	Control the lights, sound, and textures.
----------------	--

Mixed ages:	Give each person a role.
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Mobility:	Plan seated activities.
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Lower cost:	Use books, boxes, blankets, and kitchen items.
-------------	--

Small space:	Use a table, a blanket, or the floor.
--------------	---------------------------------------

Screen use:	Pair a movie night with a planned break or a related activity.
-------------	--

Cultural or faith themes:	If a theme is about a culture or faith, learn about it respectfully, ideally from people who practice it.
---------------------------	---

Before You Go

- ☐ What is our theme, and who picked it?
 - ☐ What do we need, and what do we have at home?
 - ☐ How long will it last?
 - ☐ Does anyone have allergies?
 - ☐ What is each person's job?
 - ☐ What is the plan if the theme falls flat?
 - ☐ How will we clean up?
-

Related

Movies ([profile 17](#)). Family game nights ([profile 28](#)). Cooking together, trying new foods, and eating out ([profile 27](#)). Picnics ([profile 11](#)). Making art and music ([profile 20](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). Parent Guide 10.

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2023, May 3). *The power of play: How fun and games help children thrive*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/The-Power-of-Play-How-Fun-and-Games-Help-Children-Thrive.aspx>

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Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Time with Family and Friends

SETTING

Homes, parks, community spaces, video calls, and shared meals.

TYPICAL TIME

Ten minutes to a day.

COST

Free to low.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Small gatherings are quieter. Large gatherings are livelier.

What to Expect

This profile covers everyday time with relatives, friends, and neighbors. Examples are shared meals, playdates, visits with grandparents, family reunions, calls with relatives, sleepovers, and hanging out in a yard.

It is the least structured profile in this guide. Families define “family” in different ways, and this guide includes chosen family, friends, and neighbors.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Playing with other children.**
- **Sharing and taking turns.**
- **Knowing relatives and family stories.**
- **Being a guest and a host.**
- **Managing feelings** in group play.
- **Learning family routines.**

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Time with caregivers and familiar relatives. Short visits and routines help.
3 to 5	Playdates with one or two children. Adults often stay close.
6 to 10	Playdates, family visits, and sleepovers for some children. Friendships begin to matter.
11 to 12	Time with friends, relatives, and groups. Many want more independence.
13 to 17	Time with friends and family, including as hosts. Teens may want more say in family time.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can share stories, meals, and caregiving. Seating and quieter spaces can help older relatives.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

hosts, schools, and programs set their own rules; for example, some places limit guests or require adult supervision.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

supervision, safe spaces, allergies, and accessibility.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Catching up with people they care about.
 - Support from other parents.
 - Sharing traditions.
 - Relaxing with friends.
 - Seeing children play together.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Meals and games together.
- Sharing stories.
- Making routines, such as Sunday dinner.
- Celebrating together.
- Keeping in touch across distance.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

(*Guidance*) The AAP's play article says playing with both parents and peers is key to building thriving brains, bodies and social bonds, and says it is parents' and caregivers' presence and attention that enriches children (updated May 3, 2023). The AAP media plan page suggests designating screen-free zones such as mealtimes, and leaving time for offline activities (updated January 20, 2026). The AAP advises eating family meals together (updated June 21, 2024).

WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM

In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from spending time with family and friends that I could use here. This guide does not state that any amount or type of time improves well-being or relationships. It does not define what a family should look like.

POTENTIAL BENEFIT

Time with family and friends may offer connection and shared memories. What it offers depends on the people and the setting.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Mostly free. Food and travel for gatherings can add up. Potlucks help.
--------------	--

Crowds and noise:	Large gatherings can be tiring for some children.
--------------------------	---

Waiting:	Travel and meals may take longer than expected.
-----------------	---

Transportation and parking:	Visits depend on distance and cost.
------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Accessibility:	Check stairs, seating, and restrooms for older relatives and guests with disabilities.
-----------------------	--

Restrooms and changing:	Plan for babies and young children.
--------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Food and drink:	Check allergies and dietary needs. Ask the host.
------------------------	--

Time:	Visits can be short.
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Age-related rules:	Rules about sleepovers, supervision, and guests vary by family. Agree on them in advance.
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Different views:	Families may disagree on parenting, food, or media. Talk about expectations ahead of time.
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Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Keep visits short and keep routines.
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Sensory needs:	Plan a quiet room and breaks.
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Distance:	Use video calls, letters, or recorded stories.
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Lower cost:	Share a potluck or meet in a park.
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Mixed ages:	Plan activities for each age group.
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Hosting:	Keep it simple. Ask guests to bring a dish.
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Limited time:	Ten minutes of attention still counts. Choose small routines.
---------------	---

Building community:	Invite a neighbor, a classmate's family, or someone new.
---------------------	--

Before You Go

- ☐ Who is coming, and what do they need?
 - ☐ What will we do together?
 - ☐ Does anyone have allergies or sensory needs?
 - ☐ Is the space accessible?
 - ☐ How long will we stay?
 - ☐ What are the rules about screens and sleepovers?
 - ☐ What is the plan if someone needs a break?
-

Related

Cooking together, trying new foods, and eating out ([profile 27](#)). Picnics ([profile 11](#)). Family game nights ([profile 28](#)). At-home themed experiences ([profile 30](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2023, May 3). *The power of play: How fun and games help children thrive*. HealthyChildren.org. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/The-Power-of-Play-How-Fun-and-Games-Help-Children-Thrive.aspx>

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CATEGORY 7 OF 7

Community & Local Discovery

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Farmers Markets & Farms

SETTING

Outdoor or indoor markets, farm stands, pick-your-own farms, and farm visits.

TYPICAL TIME

One to three hours.

COST

Varies. Browsing is free. Food and activities cost money. Some markets accept food assistance benefits.

SENSORY LEVEL

Moderate. Markets can be crowded and noisy. Farms are often quieter.

What to Expect

A farmers market is a place where local growers and makers sell food directly to shoppers. Many also have music, prepared food, and activities. Some farms offer pick-your-own fruit, farm stands, animal visits, hayrides, and seasonal events.

Hours and seasons vary. Many markets run weekly in warm months, and some run year-round.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Seeing where food comes from:** growers, plants, and animals.
- **Choosing and counting:** picking produce and handling a small budget.
- **Trying new foods** and samples.
- **Talking with growers.**
- **Noticing seasons.**
- **Picking fruit or vegetables.**
- **Seeing farm animals,** where offered.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Looking, tasting soft samples, and riding in a stroller or carrier. Crowds and heat can be a lot.
3 to 5	Choosing a fruit, walking, and seeing animals. Hand washing is important.
6 to 10	Helping shop, picking produce, and asking questions.
11 to 12	Planning a meal, handling money, and talking with sellers.
13 to 17	Shopping for the family, volunteering, or working at a stand.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults and elders can share cooking and gardening knowledge. Seating and shade matter.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:

see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:

markets set rules for pets, samples, and payment; farms may charge admission or set age limits for activities.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:

animal contact and handwashing, crowds, heat, uneven ground, and food safety.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Fresh, local food.
 - Meeting growers.
 - Cooking with seasonal food.
 - Being outdoors.
 - Supporting local business.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Choosing food together.
- Cooking what you bought.
- Making a regular visit.
- Picking fruit together.
- Sharing a snack.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	<i>(Program information)</i> The USDA says the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides fresh, unprepared, locally grown produce to WIC participants. The page does not give eligibility or redemption details and shows no date. Ask your state WIC agency about participation. For SNAP, the USDA's SNAP page links to information on where benefits can be used (updated September 4, 2026). The page does not mention farmers markets, so ask the market whether it accepts SNAP.
ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	<i>(Guidance, farm animals)</i> The CDC says to wash hands with soap and running water after contact with animals, their products, their stalls or feces, and farm items such as fences and buckets. It says adults should supervise handwashing for children under 5, that children under 5 should not handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or live poultry, and that people should not eat or drink in animal areas (June 15, 2026).
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	In the sources reviewed, I did not find research on outcomes from visiting farmers markets or farms. This guide does not state that these visits improve nutrition, eating habits, or health.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	A visit may offer a chance to see where food comes from and try new foods. What a family gets from it depends on the market, the farm, and the season.

Safety Note: Farm Animals

- Wash hands with soap and running water after touching animals or anything in their areas (CDC).
- Children under 5 should not handle or touch chicks, ducklings, or live poultry, and an adult should supervise their handwashing (CDC).
- Do not eat or drink in animal areas (CDC).
- For more information, see the CDC page on farm animals (link in Sources).

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Cost:	Prices vary. Ask about benefits programs and any matching programs. Bring cash and a bag.
Crowds and noise:	Markets are busiest mid-morning. Early or late visits are calmer.

Waiting:	Popular stalls may have lines.
Transportation and parking:	Parking may be limited. Check transit.
Accessibility:	Ask about paths, surfaces, seating, and restrooms. Farms may have uneven ground.
Restrooms and changing:	Not all markets have restrooms. Check ahead.
Food and drink:	Check ingredients and allergies with sellers. Wash produce before eating.
Weather:	Outdoor markets and farms depend on weather. Plan for sun, rain, and mud.
Time:	Seasons and hours vary. Check the market's website.
Age-related rules:	Pick-your-own farms and activities may set age limits or require supervision.
Pets:	Many markets restrict pets. Check the rules.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Go early, keep visits short, and bring a stroller or carrier.
Sensory needs:	Visit early or on a quiet day. Bring ear protection if needed.
Mobility:	Ask about paths and seating. Bring a chair.
Food assistance:	Ask the market whether it accepts SNAP or WIC farmers market benefits. See the USDA pages in Sources.
Lower cost:	Browse, buy one item, or share a purchase.
Allergies:	Talk with sellers before buying. Avoid sample tables if needed.
No market nearby:	Look for a farm stand, a community garden, or a grocery store's local produce.
Mixed ages:	Give each person a job, such as holding the bag or picking the fruit.

Before You Go

- ☐ What day and time is the market open?
 - ☐ How can we pay, and are benefits accepted?
 - ☐ Is the ground easy to walk on, and are there restrooms?
 - ☐ Are there animals, and where can we wash our hands?
 - ☐ Does anyone have allergies?
 - ☐ Can we bring a stroller, bags, or a pet?
 - ☐ What is the plan for heat or rain?
-

Related

Gardens ([profile 9](#)). Cooking together, trying new foods, and eating out ([profile 27](#)). Exploring a different neighborhood ([profile 29](#)). Zoos and aquariums ([profile 12](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

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Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Volunteering Together

SETTING

Community organizations, schools, parks, food pantries, libraries, faith groups, and neighborhood projects.

TYPICAL TIME

One hour to a day, or a regular schedule.

COST

Usually free. Some projects need supplies or travel.

SENSORY LEVEL

Varies. Cleanups and events can be loud. Quiet tasks such as sorting or writing cards exist.

What to Expect

Volunteering together means a family gives time to a community effort. Examples are park cleanups, food drives, packing food or supplies, community gardens, reading to others, neighbor help, or helping at an event.

Many organizations set age limits, require sign-up, or have family-friendly projects. Some tasks are not safe for young children.

What Children Might Explore

These are possibilities, not guarantees.

- **Helping others:** seeing a need and acting on it.
- **Working as a team.**
- **Learning about a community issue.**
- **Doing a task with a purpose:** sorting, planting, packing.
- **Meeting people** from different backgrounds.
- **Choosing a cause** they care about.
- **Reflecting:** what it felt like and what they noticed.

Across Ages

These are reference points, not rules. Children vary widely within each range.

0 to 2	Usually watching, or very small tasks with an adult, such as handing items. Many projects have age limits.
3 to 5	Simple tasks such as sorting, drawing cards, or planting, with an adult.
6 to 10	Packing, planting, collecting, and helping with simple tasks. Many projects welcome this age.
11 to 12	More tasks, such as serving or organizing. Some programs have age minimums.
13 to 17	Many roles are open. Teens may volunteer on their own, for a cause, or for school credit.
Adults and multigenerational	Adults can volunteer alongside children or lead. Seating and shade help.

DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES:
see What Children Might Explore.

PROVIDER RULES:
organizations set age minimums, sign-up rules, waivers, and background-check policies; some require a parent to stay.

SAFETY AND ACCESS:
supervision, safe tasks, tools, weather, and accessibility.

What Adults Might Enjoy

- Contributing to the community.
 - Teaching values through action.
 - Meeting neighbors.
 - Using their skills.
 - Time together with a purpose.
-

What Families Might Experience Together

- Working side by side.
- Talking about why the work matters.
- Choosing a cause together.
- Making it a tradition.
- Feeling proud of shared effort.

Evidence Notes

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE	This profile cites no research or guidance. It is practical information about how family volunteering usually works.
WHAT THIS GUIDE DOES NOT CLAIM	This guide does not state that volunteering improves children's character, empathy, or well-being, or the community's outcomes. It does not recommend any organization or tell families whether to volunteer.
POTENTIAL BENEFIT	Volunteering may offer a way to contribute and spend time together. What a family gets from it depends on the project and the people.

Potential Considerations

Practical considerations unless a source is shown.

Practical considerations. I did not find a source.

Cost:	Usually free. Gloves, supplies, or travel may add costs.
Crowds and noise:	Large events can be busy.
Waiting:	Sign-in and instructions can take time.
Transportation and parking:	Check location and transit.
Accessibility:	Ask which tasks are seated, quiet, or indoor.
Restrooms and changing:	Not always available at outdoor sites.
Food and drink:	Bring water. Check whether food is provided.
Time:	Choose short shifts for young children.
Age-related rules:	Many organizations set minimum ages, require a parent to stay, or require a waiver. Ask first.
Safety:	Tools, heavy lifting, and certain tasks are not safe for young children. Follow the organizer's directions.
Fit:	Choose a project that matches the family's values and abilities. Some work involves sensitive situations.

Ways to Adapt

Young children:	Choose a simple task, such as sorting or decorating cards.
Sensory needs:	Choose a quiet role, such as writing cards or packing.
Mobility:	Choose seated tasks or indoor work.
Limited time:	Try a one-time project or a small neighborhood effort.
Lower cost:	Do a project at home, such as collecting items or helping a neighbor.
Mixed ages:	Assign tasks by ability and have an adult lead.
Teens:	Let teens choose the cause and lead.
Reflection:	Talk about it afterward.

Before You Go

- ☐ What does the organization do, and why do we care about it?
 - ☐ What are the age rules and sign-up steps?
 - ☐ What will each person do?
 - ☐ Is the task safe and appropriate for our children?
 - ☐ How long is the shift?
 - ☐ What should we wear and bring?
 - ☐ How will we talk about it afterward?
-

Related

Libraries ([profile 4](#)). Gardens ([profile 9](#)). Farmers markets and farms ([profile 32](#)). Festivals, community celebrations, and seasonal traditions ([profile 19](#)). [Parent Guide 09](#). [Parent Guide 10](#).

Sources

No sources are cited for this profile. It contains practical considerations only. Ask the organization you plan to volunteer with about its rules.

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.

Compare up to three options

Use this when you are deciding between a few ideas. Read the At a glance lines in each profile, then fill in what fits your family.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Experience			
Setting (indoor, outdoor, home)			
Typical time			
Cost range (in words)			
Sensory level			
How we would get there			
Fits our ages?			
Questions to ask before we go			
What worries us			
Our pick			

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Questions to ask before you go

Use this when you call or check a venue's website. Check the boxes that matter to your family.

- ☐ What are the hours, and when is it least crowded?
- ☐ What are the costs, and are there reduced-price or free options?
- ☐ Are there age, height, or other rules?
- ☐ Do we need a reservation, ticket, or waiver?
- ☐ Is there an accessibility guide? Ask about entrances, seating, routes, and restrooms.
- ☐ Are there quiet times, quiet spaces, or sensory resources?
- ☐ Is there parking? If not, where else can we park or how else can we get there (nearby lots, street parking, transit, drop-off)? Is accessible parking available?
- ☐ Are there family restrooms and changing tables?
- ☐ What is the food and drink policy? Can we bring our own?
- ☐ How are allergies handled?
- ☐ Is there somewhere to rest or take a break?
- ☐ What happens in bad weather?

Notes

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Plan the day

Fill in what you need. Leave the rest blank.

Item	Our plan
Where and when we are going	
When we leave and when we plan to be back	
How we are getting there	
Who is in charge of what	
Where we will meet if we get separated	
Break plan (when, where)	
Food and water plan	
Backup plan (weather, tired children, closed venue)	

What to bring

☐ Water and snacks	☐ Diapers, wipes, or supplies
☐ Weather gear and sun protection	☐ Ear protection
☐ Change of clothes	☐ Tickets, passes, or reservation information
☐ Medicines and allergy items	☐ Phone numbers written on paper
☐ Comfort items	☐ Other

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Everyone's needs

Use this to think through what each person might need.

Person	Age	What helps this person	What to bring or ask about

Things to consider

☐ Sensory needs (noise, light, crowds, textures)

☐ Mobility and seating

☐ Vision or hearing needs

☐ Food allergies or dietary needs

☐ Naps, feeding, or medical routines

☐ Language or communication

☐ Energy and how long a visit will feel good

☐ Anything else

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Sensory-friendly index

This index shows each profile's sensory level as written in the profile, and its sensory suggestion where it has one. Sensory-friendly programs exist at some venues. Only two are described from sources: AMC Theatres' sensory friendly films ([Movies](#)) and the Kennedy Center's sensory-friendly performances ([Live Performances](#)). Ask each venue what it offers.

#	EXPERIENCE	SENSORY LEVEL	SENSORY SUGGESTION
1	Children's Museums	Often lively and noisy. Quieter times or sensory-friendly sessions may be available.	Bring what helps your family, such as ear protection, a comfort item, or a break plan.
2	Science, Natural History & History Museums	Varies. Hands-on halls can be lively. Galleries can be quieter.	Bring what helps, such as ear protection or a comfort item. Know where exits and quiet spaces are.
3	Art Museums & Galleries	Often quieter. Some spaces are hushed, and others host lively family events.	Ask about quiet hours. Know where to take a break.
4	Libraries	Often quieter. Children's areas and programs can be lively.	Look for a quiet corner. Ask about sensory-friendly programs.
5	Heritage Sites & Historic Places	Varies. Open sites can be quiet. Tours and events can be busy.	Look for quieter times and outdoor spaces for breaks.
6	Parks and Playgrounds	Varies. A busy playground can be loud, and a quiet corner of a park can be calm.	Visit once at a quiet time so the space becomes familiar. Bring what helps.
7	Nature Trails & Walks	Often quiet. Weather, crowds, and terrain vary.	Choose a shaded, quiet trail. Bring what helps, and plan breaks.
8	Beaches, Lakes & Rivers	Varies. Water, sun, wind, and crowds can be intense. Quiet spots may be available.	Look for shade and a quiet spot. Bring what helps, such as a hat or ear protection.
9	Gardens (Botanical and Community)	Often quiet and calm, with strong smells and textures in some areas.	Gardens can be quiet, but strong smells or buzzing insects may bother some. Look for a calm area.
10	Camping	Often quiet in the daytime. Night noise, light, temperature, and sleeping on the ground can be a lot for some people.	Bring familiar sleep items, ear protection, and a plan for a hard night.

#	EXPERIENCE	SENSORY LEVEL	SENSORY SUGGESTION
11	Picnics	Varies. Can be quiet or lively.	Choose a quiet corner. Bring familiar foods and a plan for breaks.
12	Zoos & Aquariums	Often lively. Some exhibits are loud, dark, or crowded. Quiet areas may be available.	Look for sensory bags, quiet areas, or headphone zones. Know where the exits are.
13	Amusement Parks	Often high. Crowds, noise, motion, and lights are common. Some areas are calmer.	Take breaks in quiet areas. Bring ear protection if it helps. Ask the park about sensory or accessibility resources.
14	Water Parks	Often high. Noise, echo, crowds, and splashing are common. Some areas are calmer.	Take breaks in quiet or shaded areas. Ear protection may help in loud areas.
15	Family Entertainment Centers	Often high. Arcades can be loud, bright, and busy. Escape rooms and laser tag can be dark or intense.	Ask about quiet hours or lower-volume times. Ear protection may help.
16	Indoor Play Spaces & Play Cafes	Often high. Noise and echo are common. Some offer calmer or sensory-friendly times.	Ask about quiet or sensory-friendly sessions, or visit at off-peak times.
17	Movies	Moderate to high in a theater. Dark, loud, and large screens. Lower at home.	Ask the theater about sensory-friendly showings, such as AMC's program (see Evidence Notes). Bring ear protection. Sit near an exit. Home viewing allows lower volume and lights.
18	Live Performances	Varies. Often dark with amplified sound. Some performances offer lower sound and light levels.	Ask about sensory-friendly performances. Bring earmuffs. Preview the venue and show if materials are available (Kennedy Center).
19	Festivals, Community Celebrations & Seasonal and Holiday Traditions	Varies. Parades, fireworks, and festivals can be loud and crowded. Home traditions can be quiet.	Arrive early, find a quieter spot, bring earmuffs, and plan breaks.
20	Making Art and Music	Varies. Messy materials and loud instruments may be a lot for some children.	Choose materials that feel comfortable. Offer a quieter space. Some children dislike sticky or wet textures.
21	Swimming, Pools & Splash Pads	Often high. Echo, splashing, and crowds are common. Quieter times exist.	Ask for a quieter session or bring ear protection.
22	Skating	Moderate to high at rinks. Music, noise, and crowds are common.	Ask about quieter sessions or off-peak times.
23	Biking	Low to moderate. Traffic and crowds on shared paths can add noise.	Choose quiet paths and plan breaks.

#	EXPERIENCE	SENSORY LEVEL	SENSORY SUGGESTION
24	Bowling & Miniature Golf	Moderate to high. Bowling alleys can be loud. Mini golf is usually quieter.	Ask about quieter times or lanes away from music.
25	Recreational Sports (Playing and Watching)	Varies. Games can be loud and crowded. Practice can be quieter.	Ask about the coach, noise, and breaks.
26	Recreation & Community Centers	Varies. Gyms can be loud. Classrooms and open rooms can be quieter.	Ask about quieter times.
27	Cooking Together, Trying New Foods & Eating Out	Varies. Kitchens have smells, heat, and noise. Restaurants can be loud or quiet.	Some children dislike textures, smells, or noise. Let them watch or take breaks.
28	Family Game Nights (Including Video Games Together)	Low to moderate. Lively games can be loud. Screens add light and sound.	Choose quiet games and dim lights, or limit screen time.
29	Exploring a Different Neighborhood	Varies. Busy streets are stimulating. Quiet streets and parks are calmer.	Choose quiet streets or parks. Plan breaks.
30	At-Home Themed Experiences	Low to moderate. You control lights, sound, and pace.	Control the lights, sound, and textures.
31	Time with Family and Friends	Varies. Small gatherings are quieter. Large gatherings are livelier.	Plan a quiet room and breaks.
32	Farmers Markets & Farms	Moderate. Markets can be crowded and noisy. Farms are often quieter.	Visit early or on a quiet day. Bring ear protection if needed.
33	Volunteering Together	Varies. Cleanups and events can be loud. Quiet tasks such as sorting or writing cards exist.	Choose a quiet role, such as writing cards or packing.

Situation index

Find experiences by what your family needs today. These lists are based on the typical case in each profile. Individual venues differ.

Low or no cost

Cost line begins with "no cost," "low," "free," or similar.

4	Libraries
6	Parks and Playgrounds
7	Nature Trails & Walks
11	Picnics
16	Indoor Play Spaces & Play Cafes
17	Movies
19	Festivals, Community Celebrations & Seasonal and Holiday Traditions
21	Swimming, Pools & Splash Pads
23	Biking
24	Bowling & Miniature Golf
26	Recreation & Community Centers
28	Family Game Nights (Including Video Games Together)
29	Exploring a Different Neighborhood
30	At-Home Themed Experiences
31	Time with Family and Friends
33	Volunteering Together

Cost ranges widely. Ask about free or reduced options.

Cost line describes a range or varies.

1	Children's Museums
2	Science, Natural History & History Museums
3	Art Museums & Galleries
5	Heritage Sites & Historic Places
8	Beaches, Lakes & Rivers
9	Gardens (Botanical and Community)
10	Camping
12	Zoos & Aquariums
13	Amusement Parks
14	Water Parks
15	Family Entertainment Centers
18	Live Performances
20	Making Art and Music
22	Skating
25	Recreational Sports (Playing and Watching)
27	Cooking Together, Trying New Foods & Eating Out
32	Farmers Markets & Farms

Indoors, for bad weather

Setting line begins with “indoor” or “mostly indoor.”

1	Children's Museums
2	Science, Natural History & History Museums
3	Art Museums & Galleries
4	Libraries
5	Heritage Sites & Historic Places
12	Zoos & Aquariums
15	Family Entertainment Centers
16	Indoor Play Spaces & Play Cafes
21	Swimming, Pools & Splash Pads
22	Skating
24	Bowling & Miniature Golf
26	Recreation & Community Centers

Little or no travel

Setting line includes home, yard, or driveway.

11	Picnics
17	Movies
19	Festivals, Community Celebrations & Seasonal and Holiday Traditions
20	Making Art and Music
23	Biking
27	Cooking Together, Trying New Foods & Eating Out
28	Family Game Nights (Including Video Games Together)
30	At-Home Themed Experiences
31	Time with Family and Friends

Indoor options exist

Setting line mentions indoor options.

11	Picnics
13	Amusement Parks
14	Water Parks
23	Biking
32	Farmers Markets & Farms

Quieter settings

Sensory line begins with “often quiet,” “often quieter,” or “low.”

3	Art Museums & Galleries
4	Libraries
7	Nature Trails & Walks
9	Gardens (Botanical and Community)
10	Camping
23	Biking
28	Family Game Nights (Including Video Games Together)
30	At-Home Themed Experiences

Flexible length, short visits fine

Time line begins with “flexible” or “varies.”

1	Children's Museums
2	Science, Natural History & History Museums
3	Art Museums & Galleries
4	Libraries
5	Heritage Sites & Historic Places
6	Parks and Playgrounds
7	Nature Trails & Walks
8	Beaches, Lakes & Rivers
9	Gardens (Botanical and Community)
11	Picnics

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Combined source list

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Profiles with no sources: Family Entertainment Centers, Bowling & Miniature Golf, Volunteering Together.

Educational information only. Not medical, legal, or financial advice. Information reviewed: 2026.



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