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# Yes, You Can Take Family Field Trips... with AD/HD

by Karen Sampson, MA

## FOR THE FRIDGE

**FAMILY FIELD TRIPS** are important. Parents and children have the opportunity to see each other in different roles and in new places, replacing routine with excitement and a chance for wonder. Some families affected by AD/HD hesitate to plan day trips, short vacations, or an afternoon at a museum, out of concern that the symptoms will spoil the fun. Nothing ends a good day out faster than a meltdown! It is possible, though, to have these short adventures if you do a little planning ahead of time.

### Know your child and your limits

- Be honest with yourself about how much your child can handle and for how long. This goes for you and any other adults, too—especially anyone who also has AD/HD.
- How long can your child go without becoming overwhelmed or losing focus?
- How much activity or stimulation can your child take? Be aware of crowds, noises and transitions. How well can they be handled?
- What does your child find interesting? What do you find interesting? Focus on what grabs your child's attention, no matter how quirky or different from your own interests.

### Keep it local

- Find out what activities or centers of interest are in your area. The less travel time, the more time to spend enjoying your field trip.
- Consider unusual spots or locations experiencing slow seasons. Fewer attendees can mean more in-depth information and attention for your family.
- Choose one activity or location and savor it, rather than rushing between events or places.

### Research it first

Advance research can benefit the whole family.

- Call ahead. Find out when the destination has the fewest attendees and schedule your trip for that time.
- Ask if there is a tour guide or docent available. Mention you are bringing a child with attention difficulties and ask what accommodations are available.
- Reserve what you need ahead of time—including the use of a quiet space to regroup if the activity becomes overwhelming.
- Find out what food is available! Hunger and grumpiness can bring a good day to an end very quickly. Learn the policies on bringing your own lunch or snacks.
- Help children discover what is important about the point of interest. Help younger children find books on it. Older children can search for websites about it.
- Pick one special item to focus on—a specific event, area, piece of art, or machinery.
- Let children help plan items to pack based on what they learned about the destination.

### Role-playing adds to the fun

Anticipate situations that could arise. Role-playing prepares your child and gives him or her tools ahead of time, helping to defuse crises and keep things enjoyable.

- Practice talking in a quiet voice with your child.
- Take turns being the tour guide and pretending to ask questions (also a good opportunity to practice turn-taking).
- Practice with your child how

to ask someone to speak up and how to address someone who has spoken sharply.

- Teach your child what to do should he or she become separated from you. Practice what information to share and with whom.



### Have a back-up plan ready

Life happens, especially on field trips. Prepare.

- Plan one fun activity as a substitute if your trip is rained out or canceled.
- Know where you can take a break anytime you need one.
- Scope out alternate restaurants, food courts, and picnic areas.
- Be able to leave the destination at anytime. Be careful about selecting contained activities such as boat rides or amusement parks.
- Know whether you can send another adult with one group of children while you stay with the other.

Remember to relax and go with the flow. It may not turn out as planned, but it will still be memorable for your child—and that is what counts. ●

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