

Child Care plus +

+ Field Trips for All

Field trips and excursions are an important (and fun) part of the learning process in early care and education programs. Children's curiosity and interest can be stimulated and questions better answered when they interact meaningfully with people, materials, equipment, and environments in their local neighborhood and community. The places you visit become extensions of your learning environment. As a result, field trips require the same careful planning to insure quality learning experiences are accessible to each child.

Selecting the place or event to visit is the first step. Most of us have favorites based on our knowledge of child development and past experience. However, observation of children's interests is a better place to start selecting meaningful experiences for the current group. What are children talking about as they arrive each day? What kinds of themes are emerging in their play? These observations alert you to their interests and to neighborhood events like a new home being built or a street being resurfaced—indicating that a timely excursion would be appropriate.

As you consider possible destinations, think about how they fit with your program's curriculum and philosophy. Sometimes children's interests do match your goals. You might *not* follow-up on children's interest in a new movie because of the aggressiveness that has emerged in their play based on the characters. Other times, your commitment to meeting the needs of *each* child is the deciding factor. For instance, you may choose to pass over an emerging interest in bugs and a possible trip to the local entomology lab because a child in the group is dreadfully frightened of insects.

Visiting a potential field trip site beforehand helps you explore important realities. Is the walking distance reasonable for young children? Are restrooms readily available? Will there be enough for children to see and do? Does the space accommodate the size of your group? If there will be a guide, ask for details of the tour. Suggest focus areas that are of particular interest to children in your group. Describe the developmental level and attention span of the children; brainstorm ways to promote hands-on experiences.

This conversation will help you in your planning, and increase community awareness of quality early childhood practices.

Once you have visited a field trip site, define your list of key experiences—what do you want children to explore and learn during the excursion? What do you have planned for meaningful experiences in the classroom to follow-up on children's questions, interests, and enthusiasm?

In the process of making sure the field trip experience is suitable for the children in your group, you have probably started considering individual appropriateness. Begin picturing individual children after the pre-visit—notice areas which may be of particular interest, consider supervision and safety issues and walk through the logistics of the trip with each child in mind. It is important to capture these thoughts on paper as soon as possible for your planning purposes.

Using your key learning goals and knowledge of the site, you can continue "trying on" the appropriateness of the trip for each child and considering adaptations that will allow you to better meet individual strengths, needs, and interests. This might mean planning to spend time preparing for the trip with a child who has difficulty making transitions, bring some topic-related manipulatives for a child who has a limited attention span, invite a child with a strong interest in the topic to co-host the trip and share some of her knowledge, or change the actual site to make the trip physically accessible for a child. The bottom line here is that field trips are for everyone—it is your responsibility to plan excursions that meet the needs of each child—just as you plan activities within your program. +

SHW

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+ FROM THE SOURCE

Team Members Can Help

Here are ways team members have assisted child care programs in planning for field trips: ■ A physical therapist loaned a wheelchair that could get wet when a field trip was planned to the wading pools at a local park. ■ A speech therapist gave staff pictures of how to form signs for wild animal names to use to talk about their upcoming visit to the zoo because they had a child who used sign language. ■ A parent invited her child's grandparents to go on a field trip to the hospital to provide extra supervision. ■ A special education teacher rearranged her schedule so she could accompany the group to provide extra guidance and support for a child with behavior challenges. ■ At a meeting, team members discussed potential field trips to support the child's developmental goals of increased vocabulary and impulse control. ■ One child's father came along as official photographer so staff could make a memory book. ■ A motor therapist helped staff make minor adaptations to a car seat in the program's van for a child with a significant motor impairment.

Share your plans well in advance. Describe what you plan to do, how you expect the child to be included, and any challenges. Ask specific questions. Input from team members will make field trips more successful and more meaningful for the children. + SAM

+ MAKING IT WORK

Field Trip Safety Pack

A "fanny pack" is an ideal way to organize the first aid and safety supplies that should be carried on each field trip—whether it is a walk to a park or a bus trip to the zoo. Your safety pack should include basic first aid supplies *and* specialized supplies to meet individual health needs of children in your group (such as an inhaler or medication). In addition, be sure that at least one adult on the trip is certified in emergency first aid and CPR.

Copy the following list to *keep in the pack*. Use the list to double check that the pack is well stocked and that specialized supplies are carried on EACH trip. + SHW

BASIC SUPPLIES

- each child's emergency contact information
- special supplies needed by a particular child
- band-aids, small ace wrap, gauze, tissues
- disposable plastic gloves
- sealed alcohol wipes
- tweezers, insect sting preparation
- coins for a pay phone (or cell phone)

+ NOTES FROM HOME

Adam Goes on the Field Trip

Last spring our child care program sent home a permission slip for an upcoming field trip to a local bottling plant. My child has severe disabilities and uses a wheelchair, and I could not imagine that the staff would want to take him along nor could I understand how he would benefit from such a trip. It made me sad to think of all the other children enjoying this trip knowing that my son was not aware enough of his surroundings to benefit from the experience. And it made me more than a little angry that the teachers were insensitive enough to send home a permission slip as if it were possible for Adam to go along. I sent it back the next day with a note saying that Adam would not be joining the group. The director of the program called me that afternoon to say they were disappointed that Adam would not be going on the field trip. I thought she was joking, but she was serious. Apparently, the staff had already made special arrangements with the local bus company to accommodate the wheelchair and were convinced that Adam would enjoy the trip—especially since he is so tuned in to sounds. She even invited me to join the group.

Adam did go to the bottling plant, and I went, too. It was quite an experience. No one knew exactly how to use the chair tie-down in the bus, and it took all hands (including the bus driver) to get Adam onto the bus. No one counted on the extra time it took to get everyone else buckled in, and I certainly could not have predicted the joy and excitement as all twenty-two kids screamed and laughed throughout the tour. Adam may not have been aware of everything that was going on, but he was clearly delighted with the loud clanging noises and loved it when the children got "accidentally" sprayed with a hose. It wasn't easy to include Adam in this field trip, and I know that it took time and planning on the part of the staff and the director, but it was worth it! +

+ SPOTLIGHT: Making Field Trips Safe

Activities that take children outside the early childhood program usually increase in the summer when there is a wide range of opportunities to explore the neighborhood. These excursions, whether planned field trips or walks to play in local parks, can be fun and exciting for everyone. However, events that occur outside the familiar and more controlled school environment are potentially not as safe as routine classroom events. The following planning process can help insure the safety of these experiences.

Become familiar with the field trip site. Tour the site *the day before* you plan to visit. Determine the best walking route or check for safe, accessible parking. Look for possible hazards, such as farm machinery or running water and temporary hazards, like broken glass or a nearby construction project. Eliminate the hazard, if possible, or develop a plan for keeping children away from it. You may need to postpone or cancel if the site has extreme risks.

Check again that families know everything about the trip—exact location, time of departure, route, and return time—and make sure that you stick with your plan. When parents sign a release form for excursions, you are entering into an important agreement that can enhance a trusting relationship. Avoid unnecessary parent worries or hassles by honoring that agreement.

Recruit parents, volunteers, and extra staff whenever possible to help supervise. Increased individual attention enhances the learning experience for the children as well. Assign each adult a few children as their primary focus. Once each child has been assigned, you can focus on children's needs overall as well as move from group to group as needed. Color coded name tags can help identify group placements at a glance.

Carry a copy of each child's medical emergency card with you. Take standard first aid supplies and carefully consider supplies or equipment you need to meet unique medical needs of individual children in your group.

Determine your safety rules by answering the following questions. ✓How will children transition from the program to selected transportation or to begin their trip? ✓Will the children stay with their small groups, hold hands in pairs, or walk in a field trip "sandwich" (one or two adults in front, one

or two adults in back, and the children moving in the middle)?

✓What will the groups of children do upon arrival at the site? ✓Will they sing songs or play a game until everyone arrives? ✓Can they begin the tour/activity?

✓How will you deal with the individual needs of children and child guidance issues? ✓Will you designate an extra adult to supervise a child who needs a break? ✓Will you provide one-on-one guidance for children who require extra support?

Communicate your goals, safety rules, and guidelines to each adult who is going along. Do not assume that typical program practices will address issues specific to each excursion. Tell the adults (or draw a map) exactly where the field trip will take place including route and parking locations if needed. Describe the key experiences and learning goals for the trip and suggest teaching and questioning strategies for them to use with the children. Inform adults of the sequence of events—what will happen first, second, third, etc. Stress safety rules and avoiding potential hazards.

Talk with children about the upcoming event; encourage questions. Let children help with planning. Facilitate discussion. What do they already know about the site or topic? What do they want to do there? What do they want to learn more about? On the day of the excursion, outline the field trip plan for the children. Outline the sequence of events so they can take an active role in self-management. Clearly explain the rules and potential hazard areas. Use role-playing, puppets, and pictures to maximize children's understanding of your expectations of them.

Plan for getting back to the program safely. Make sure each group is complete before starting back. Children are often energized by field trips. As a result, supervising adults may need help maintaining control. You may need to offer a specific guidance strategy or have a talk with an individual child.

Prepare for what children will do immediately upon returning. It is not uncommon for the excitement of a field trip to lead to over-excitement when the trip is over. A calming break (such as a story or snack) may lead to more productive processing of the experience later on. + SHW

+ What do I do when . . . ?

QUESTION: Each year, we plan a family hike on the mountain near our program. The children feel a sense of accomplishment, and we have fun exploring the view of our community—finding road patterns, identifying buildings, and locating our school. This usually leads to activities afterwards as children explore the idea of building their own towns, etc. This year, one of the children in my group uses a walker and is unable to make the hike. I don't want to cancel the hike, and I certainly don't want to exclude her. How do I make this work for everyone?

ANSWER: You've already begun to find the answer when you ask, "How do I make this work for everyone?" Field trips are an extension of your program and you already recognize the importance of including each child. In addition, you display a positive, "can do" attitude about finding a way to make it work!

You described your key goals as involving families, promoting a sense of accomplishment in the children, and exploring your community. If you look at these goals rather than at "hiking," you can develop plans that provide access for each child. Start by exploring small adaptations for the traditional hike based on the child's strengths and needs. If this child can successfully make part of the hike, you might establish your picnic site at the base of the hill and allow each child to set his or her goal for hiking distance. Or, explore other ways for the child to make the climb, such as an all-terrain wheelchair. Your awareness of the child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive strengths and needs will help you decide if these or other modifications would be appropriate.

You could also investigate alternative locations that meet the same goals and still allow everyone to fully participate. For example, the children and families could plan a bus route to "tour" your community. Or, you might look for another hiking location. Many communities have

created accessible trails, and there may be one that offers a similar vantage point as your traditional trail.

The *spirit* in which changes are made is just as critical as meeting children's individual needs. It is important to ensure that field trip traditions have grown with you in their ability to respond to the uniqueness of each group of children you experience. This process can help you discover exciting opportunities for providing every child and family with new learning experiences—as well as leading you to explore new territory! In addition, you are modeling the *spirit and practice* of inclusion for families and other members of your community. + SHW

+ RESOURCE REVIEW

Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach (Second Edition) by Lilian G. Katz and Sylvia C. Chard addresses that part of the early childhood curriculum that is intended to improve children's understandings of the world they live in. This approach opens up many possibilities for children's learning and encourages them to apply their emerging skills in informal, open-ended activities. Produced by Ablex Publishing Corporation, the book is \$ 29.50 at educational book sellers.

CHILD CARE plus is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

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