

Fabulous Fieldtrips

By Patricia Dischler

Summer is knocking on the door and it's time to open that door and run outside to discover all we can about this wonderful world we live in! While everyone agrees that giving children hands on experiences and exposing them to a variety of environments is great for brain development for them, many providers are afraid to take the plunge because of the potential headaches it will cause for their brain! How can anyone take a large group of kids out and about and not go crazy? It's actually much easier than you may think. With some pre-planning, a little organization and a positive attitude, you'll be out your door before you know it and opening up a entire world of learning possibilities for the children in your care.

There are six key elements to planning and implementing a successful field trip for all:

- ⊘ **Be prepared.** This means packing a fieldtrip bag with everything you could possibly need – from Band-Aids to diapers. Think through the entire trip and imagine all the possibilities, then pack what you need to handle all those situations.
- ⊘ **Train the kids.** Keeping control over the children while out is as easy as playing Red Light/Green Light. Teach the kids that when you say "Green Light," they can walk ahead on their own, but that when you say "Red Light, " everyone should STOP, TURN AROUND and LOOK AT YOU. This is not only fun for the kids; it easily keeps your group together and following your direction.
- ⊘ **Know where you're going.** Have a good understanding of the layout of the place you are visiting. If you have young ones in a stroller, will there be stairs? Where are the bathrooms (PLAN to take a break there!)? How far will they be walking – can all of your children handle this or will you need a stroller? What would be the appropriate shoes/clothes for the kids to wear that day? Is there food available there for a snack/meal, or will you need to pack some? If it is a tour, who is your guide and where do you meet them? How close can you park to the door? Have a good understanding of the layout and how you will guide the children through it.
- ⊘ **Account for children – don't count them.** This is the biggest mistake made on fieldtrips with multiple chaperones and the number one reason children will get lost. Rather than have everyone watching everyone, assign a particular group of children to each adult – then have that adult learn their names and assure their presence by calling their name. When you simply count head of kids it is too easy to accidentally count the head of a child from a different group. Know who your kids are and visually account for their presence.

- ⊃ **Plan for "check-in's."** Take regular stops to check in with the children, account for their presence, see if there are any issues such as a dirty diaper, someone is thirsty, etc. Don't wait for it to be an emergency.
- ⊃ **Make it FUN!** Children are much more likely to follow your guidance and learn from the experience if they are having fun! Be sure you are going somewhere developmentally appropriate for the age you have. If you are on a tour and the guide seems to be talking in a level too difficult for the children to understand – translate. Put it in words that will interest them, offer questions to the guide that will provide the information most important to your children. This also means thinking ahead to points in the fieldtrip that may not offer much fun – such as waiting (for the train to come, for the tour guide, for the food, etc.). Always pack activities to use during this time such as small notebooks/pencils for the kids to draw on, a puppet or books.

Taking fieldtrips can be as much fun for you as it is for the children! I have taken over 900 fieldtrips in my career, and I firmly believe it's not only what has led to exceptional learning for my children, but that the fun I have on these trips reduces my stress levels and has contributed to a long and happy career. Fieldtrips are something that gets better every time you do them. Children who rarely go on fieldtrips will have a harder time understanding what is acceptable behavior in a variety of settings. Children who have been going on fieldtrips since infancy will grow up understanding how they work and what is expected of them – creating fewer problems (if any!) for you.

So you're ready to give it a shot – but where do you go? EVERYWHERE! I have literally taken my hometown yellow pages, and planned fieldtrips at every listing from A-Z! Go beyond parks, zoos and museums (although definitely go there!) and show your kids what's going on all over your town. Visit construction sites, realtor offices, the barbershop, the theatre, photographer, florist, car dealer and more! Every place in this world will offer something – colors, sounds, letters, people, events, science – it's all there if you just take a little time to plan ahead and pull every lesson possible out of the location you're heading too.

I attended the first high school graduation of one of my former preschool graduates last year. When I asked her what her favorite part of my school was, it was an enthusiastic "fieldtrips!" She even went on to tell me one of her favorites was visiting the hospital where the nurses showed the children what to expect if they ever had to come to the emergency room. She said she lost her fear of having to go to a hospital after that because the nurses were all so nice. She is now enrolled at the University of Wisconsin Nursing School.

Open your door – and you'll be opening the door to a child's future!

Patricia Dischler is the author of *From Babysitter To Business Owner: Getting The Most Out Of Your Home Child Care Business* (Redleaf Press, 2005). To order the book or view the author's lecture schedule visit: www.patriciadischler.com.

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