

Special outings challenging on tight family budgets

Question: When my children were pre-schoolers, it was easy to find places for a special outing, many of them close to home and very inexpensive. Now that they are six and eight, they want to go to the theme parks they see advertised. What should I consider in finding places they will enjoy and I can afford?

Answer: There are many ways to identify great places to take your kids. Friends and other parents are the first source of information. Brochures from tourism offices can give you some new ideas. Best of all, the Internet allows us to do more detailed research. Whatever method you use, it pays to do some advance planning for a day that will satisfy the kids and the adults.

Check into some particular factors:

Activities: Are the rides and other activities suitable for the ages and interests of your kids? The parachute drop that looks so thrilling on television, may be terrifying, to both your child and you when you see it up close. You can accompany your timid child on rides that entice but seem a bit scary. It's not a good idea to push a child too far outside his comfort zone. Siblings and friends also provide extra comfort and multiply the

excitement and fun.

A park with water adds a special feature to any outing, as long as you are prepared. Swim suits, towels, sunscreen and an extra change of dry clothes may be in order. Think about the swimming skills of your young charges. If they get in trouble, who in your party will be able to get them to safety?

What activities can still be enjoyed if it rains or is cold and windy on the appointed day? Some indoor exhibits or activities can salvage a day and avoid having to cancel an anticipated treat.

A park that is intended for older children may mean there are fewer staff on-hand to monitor behaviour, so there is extra attention needed from parents to ensure the safety of younger children. Make sure there are enough adults along for the number of kids in the party. And have a contingency plan for taking one kid to the bathroom, while the others resist moving on to the next exciting activity. Discuss with the kids what to



DPSN

ASK A PARENT

do if they get lost or separated from the rest of the party.

Costs: Many families have to watch their budgets. Find out what is included in the admission price. Does it allow access to all, or almost all of the attractions? Are there package deals that combine the features you and your kids want to enjoy? If

your group is likely to ride on only the merry-go-round and the bumper cars, a limited number of tickets may be a better choice than the all-inclusive package.

One park may appear expensive, but if there are very few additional costs once you are through the gates, the total cost of the day may be less than places with a lower price of admission. Be prepared for parks with multiple concessions, midway-type games and souvenir shops, or parks that don't allow you to bring your own food. And don't forget parking: unanticipated parking fees are an unpleasant shock and can throw a budgeted day into disarray.

Once kids understand money and the concept of delayed gratification, it's a good idea to let them know what you are prepared to purchase during the day. They may enjoy making a thoughtful decision about how they want to spend their allotment — an ice cream now, or a souvenir

toy later? It's even more motivating if they are spending their own money.

Health concerns: It's impossible to judge the cleanliness and good maintenance of a park, sight unseen. But include those kinds of questions when asking other parents or friends about a particular park. A water park with crumbling or peeling surfaces and litter and spilled food in the eating areas doesn't inspire confidence in the quality of swimming water.

Food: Nothing spoils a good day more than hunger and thirst. As long as the park allows food to be brought in, pack plenty of snacks and drinks. Fresh fruit, trail mix, water and juice can fill in the spaces before lunch and a picnic is always a special treat. Find out what food is sold at the park, to ensure a purchased meal will be available to suit the tastes and budget of your party.

And it is always good to be prepared with jackets, hats, sunscreen, bug repellent, wipes, tissues. ... Does all this sound heavy? A wagon, bundle buggy (or even a stroller) can keep you from feeling like a pack mule.

With this checklist in hand, you and your kids are ready pick a destination you will all enjoy together. Have fun!

Submitted by Barbara Horvath, board member of Dufferin Parent Support Network.

Clearance That Works

Shorts from **\$9.99**
Golf Shirts up to **50% off**
T-Shirts from **\$9.99**
Sandals up to **40% off**

Offer valid until Wednesday August 5, 2009. In stock only. Sorry, no rainchecks.

Mark's Work Warehouse

Clothes That Work.

Monday to Friday
9am-9pm
Saturday
9am-6pm
Sunday
10am-5pm

imagewear
a division of Mark's Work Warehouse

53 Fourth Ave., Orangeville
519.942.1003



American Standard
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING

Rebates available on furnaces up to **\$2800**

Air conditioning up to **\$1500** in rebates

Heating pumps up to **\$2000** in rebates.

See dealer for details.



DON'T PAY FOR 12 MONTHS
See dealer for details.

FINANCING O.A.C



519-941-8429
www.hydewhipp.com