

Your Toddler Tourist

The places you'll go with your 1-year-old can be fun and educational. Let us show you how.

BY RACHEL RABKIN PECHMAN

Until now, most outings with your child may have consisted of a quick run to the grocery store or a trip to Grandma's house. But your toddler's newfound mobility and endless curiosity make this a great time to get out of the house and broaden his horizons. "Exposing him to different environments will introduce him to lots of new sights and sounds, which will stimulate his cognitive development," says Susan Goodwyn, Ph.D., a developmental psychologist and coauthor of *Baby Minds: Brain-Building Activities Your Baby Will Love*. Plus, your routine-loving 1-year-old will also get a taste of how to adjust to a change of pace.

But this doesn't mean you have to book a big family getaway. You can find a variety of toddler-friendly (and cheap) outings in your area. Check out these four expert-approved field trips—and how you can make the most of them.

TOT HOT SPOT A Park

Whether you live near a big national nature preserve or a small community park, either is a great place for taking a



Quick tip: Pack some snacks to keep your kid happy on the go.

mini hike together because there's plenty for your child to see, smell, and touch along the way. Before you hit the trails, get your toddler excited for the adventure by cutting out some nature photos, gluing them on index cards, and looking through them with her. Then on your walk, you can pull out the cards and point out the real-life squirrel or plant, suggests Heather Kempksie, coauthor of *The Siblings' Busy Book: 200 Fun Activities for Kids of Different Ages*.

Don't overplan the hike, though: Give your kid time to discover what interests her on her own. If she's fascinated by a dogwood tree, for example, talk about the different parts, such as the leaves and branches, to introduce her to new words. And don't forget to show her how

to smell the tree's flower buds and to feel its bark, which will trigger her senses. "You can reinforce what she's learned along the way by bringing home a couple of souvenirs," says Kempksie. Over the next few weeks, pull out the stone or the acorn she found and ask, "Is this the black rock from the park? Didn't we see some yellow flowers there too?"

TOT HOT SPOT A Museum

Even paintings and exhibits geared toward adults can enthrall your toddler. Take some time to point out the colors and the shapes as you stroll by the artwork. Many galleries have special areas or programs that are designed just for

BROOKE SLEZAK, STYLING; CLAUDIA HAYAR, GROOMING; NOELLE MARINELLI FOR ARTISTS; NEXT, PANTS; LONG-SLEEVED SHIRT, AND BUTTON SHIRT, CATAMINI; HAT, KIDVILLE; BACKPACK, MARIMEKKO.

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kids and encourage them to touch, play, and create their own crafts. If you're lucky enough to live near a children's museum, make sure you take advantage of the hands-on activities offered there. For instance, your child might work on his fine motor skills while twisting knobs and pulling levers at the train exhibit—or he could learn about the concept of cause and effect as he hears a different sound with each button he pushes at the music station. But if some of the attractions seem too complex for your kid, that's okay. "It's a good idea to go just a bit beyond your child's level when exposing him to new things," says Rahil Briggs, Psy.D., a child psychologist at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, New York. "You'll have to demonstrate how something works, but this will introduce him to a new set of skills that you can practice together at home." Remember to be calm and patient when he's exploring an exhibit—he might not be able to do everything exactly right, but that doesn't mean he's not benefiting from trying.

TOT HOT SPOT

A Petting Zoo

There's no doubt that children this age are completely fascinated with animals, and a petting zoo or a public farm gives you access to creatures of all shapes, sizes, colors, and even smells to spark your 1-year-old's senses. Prepare your toddler for the outing ahead of time by reading one or two picture books that include the animals you might see on the visit. You should also take time to practice petting a neighbor's dog or cat with her to show her how to do it gently and to help her feel comfortable around animals.

When you get to the zoo, let your child ease into approaching the animals. If she seems anxious or afraid, don't force it. Instead, pet the piglet or bunny yourself and give her a minute to see whether she wants to join in on the fun. While she's touching the animal, take this opportunity to work on building cognitive and language skills by asking questions like: "What color is the cow?" "What does a cow say?" suggests Dr. Goodwyn. You can

Q & A

We taught "baby signing" to our daughter, and now, at 12 months, she doesn't seem to be interested in talking. What should we do?

Most kids say a few words by their first birthday, but some take a little longer. Don't stress out about speech delays or give up on signing—just continue to encourage verbal expression throughout the day. "When you sign with your child, make sure you're saying the word as well," advises Ann Pendley, Ph.D., director of the Speech and Language Stimulation Center, in Fort Collins, Colorado. "For example, if she puts her fingertips together for 'more,' encourage her to try to say 'more' along with you before you dish up another serving," suggests Dr. Pendley. "Her vocabulary will grow as she learns to pair the sign with the sound, and when she 'gets' the word, she won't need the sign anymore." Another reason to chill: There's no evidence that signing delays speech. In fact, kids who learn this early-language skill often end up having a larger vocabulary than children who don't, possibly because they're able to take a more active role in "conversation" at a younger age, explains Dr. Pendley. And trust us, in a few years you'll probably be a little wistful for this quiet time. If she's not any closer to talking by 18 months, consult with your pediatrician or a certified speech-language pathologist.



also help her understand basic relational concepts by comparing and contrasting the size of a baby goat with bigger ones—or teach her about textures by letting her feel how a sheep's fluffy wool is different from a horse's mane. One reminder: Make sure you bring hand sanitizer with you to use after you and your toddler are through petting the animals. And the next time you sing "Old MacDonald" to her, incorporate all of the animals she spotted and touched into the song. It'll remind her of the fun day you two spent together at the petting zoo or farm.

TOT HOT SPOT

A Library

It's never too early to fill your little one with a sense of wonder about reading, and a library is a good place to start. Head over to the children's section to pick out several books together. Your toddler will be much more likely to pay attention and develop his vocabulary if he has a hand in choosing what you read, says Kempeskie. Try a variety of stories at first; you just might find a new subject matter that interests him—like fire trucks or ocean creatures—that you wouldn't have discovered at home.

Many local branches also offer free programs for kids of all ages, including storytime and puppet shows. Hearing books read out loud by someone other than you can make your child listen even more attentively. And doing it in a group setting will give you a chance to work on his social skills with other children. Before you leave, don't forget to check out a couple of new books that he'll be excited about getting his hands on when you get home. Doing this can help kick off good reading habits that will follow him into the school years and beyond. □

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