



Parenting Pizzaz in Crowds

By Judy Arnall

With a booming economy and summer tourists, many of the wonderful attractions around your favourite city, that parents like to bring their children to for entertainment and fun, can become much more crowded. Pressure is increased and stress is at an all time high. How to deal with the crowds while you are navigating the cities' amenities with children in tow? Easy if you plan ahead:

1. Be as self-sufficient as possible so you don't have to endure long line-ups for necessities. Bring food and drink: juice boxes, water bottles, individually wrapped snacks. Use the bathroom at home before you go.
2. Dress all the children you have to keep track of in one unique color. Same color T-Shirts or hats are preferable. A stand out neon color works well too. Then, every few seconds, do a color count. This is especially helpful when going to really crowded places like festivals, etc.
3. Visit places during non-traditional times: mealtimes, or when the venue first opens, or the last hour before the venue closes, are great times for enduring fewer crowds. Feed the children before you go and then visit the event during a traditional meal hour. Enjoy the event during dinnertime and then head home or out for dinner later. This is great for swimming, city parks, museums etc. The dinner hour of 4-7p.m. is the most quiet time of the day for venues because parents are rushing home from work and getting dinner on for evening activities or tourists are eating out. If you are going to an "educational" place such as museums, science centers or zoos, visit before 10 am or after 3 pm when school children and day camps typically have either not arrived or left for the day.
4. When big events are held in a city like the Calgary Stampede, do something different. Think like a tourist and then do the opposite event. For example, avoid the "Kids Day" type of events and take the kids on "Seniors Day". You might miss some special discounts and entertainment, but there will be way fewer crowds for the type of entertainment that you are looking for. For example, the children's midway at the Calgary Stampede has almost no line-ups after supper on Senior's Day. (Oh no, my secret is out!)

5. Plan ahead for city driving times. It no longer takes just a half-hour to get anywhere anymore. Build in time for road delays, bathroom breaks, etc.
6. When taking one child to the bathroom, take them all, even if no one has to go. They might just have to use the facilities when the opportunity is available.
7. Teach young children to carry their own backpacks with spare jacket and water bottle. This gets them into the habit of taking care of their belongings during and after rest stops/breaks.
8. Plan lunches that are easy to pack and nibble. Often children take one bite of a sandwich, one sip of drink, and want you to carry the rest. This is difficult if you have several children! (See #7 about carrying their own stuff!) Pack sandwiches that are cut into bite size pieces and bring finger foods in containers. Put drinks in easy-to-reseal containers or bring water bottles only.
9. If you have a baby, bring a stroller and carrier. When baby is cranky, a carrier helps to sooth them and a stroller is great for carrying everything else.
10. Have the children stay in walking buddy pairs. It's easier to see them in crowds. For toddlers, using a harness is convenient, safe and trendy.

Last, but not least, remember to put on your patience hat. It's very trying to go anywhere with children, let alone in crowded, hot places, but its so beneficial in terms of fun, experiential learning and spending time together. Be especially patient when things go wrong, (and they will!) and your children will learn another valuable lesson in optimism and problem solving! Have a fun summer!

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