

MAGICAL THEATRICAL

Tips to help your child have a positive performing arts experience.

Many parents are skeptical that their young child will sit for a theater show. Resist jumping to this conclusion! Although all children have their wriggly or even meltdown moments, most young children can focus on and enjoy a performing arts presentation. Don't miss the opportunity to acclimate your kids to a fun, enriching, and magical experience! Here are some tips to help you make the most of any theater visit with your child.

1. Be Choosy

Pick venues and performance lengths that are child friendly, as well as age appropriate subjects. For example, a two hour show about elementary school bullying probably isn't a good bet for a 3 year old. Look for shows that encourage audience participation and are flexible about early exits. Ask the venue or performer questions to determine if the show is right for your child.

2. Be Persistent

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again! Sometimes children simply need to get used to being in an audience. Story times in libraries, performances at outdoor festivals, short movies and puppet shows are all good starting points.

3. Know When to "Throw in the Towel"

Attending a performance when your child is upset (hungry, tired, etc.) will likely be an uphill battle. Also, accept that sometimes kids may simply not be in the mood for a show and want to do something else. Avoid letting the theater host a test of wills, or your child may associate

being in a theater with being miserable! Know when your child has had enough and it's time to leave. Leaving is also a courtesy to others, so they can enjoy the show without distraction.

4. Model Enthusiasm and Appropriate Interaction

Yes, you may feel silly waving your arms to a song or otherwise participating in a show (most adults do!) Remember that the show isn't about entertaining adults; it's about children experiencing a performance geared for them. Young children learn by letting their bodies and imaginations connect with each moment. Try to let go, participate, and let your child see that it's OK to become involved in the show. (You might even have fun!) Appropriate interactions also provide an outlet to discourage heckling and other inappropriate behaviors.

5. Take that Show on the Road!

Ask your child about the performance afterwards and listen to the response.

For example, is your child fascinated by the puppets used in a show? Is your child talking about the costumes a performer wore? Use your child's reactions to a performance as a jumping off point to explore and grow together. Make simple puppets out of socks or paper bags. Raid your closets to create a costume box. The library is also an excellent source for books or music your child shows interest in. Surf the internet to find other resources and information about performance types.

