

Being Truly Family Friendly

About this Guide

This guide will take you through many of the things you should consider when you are developing family audiences. We've included some case studies too from across the UK, so that you can see a family-focus in action.

At the end, you'll see a checklist of ideas to improve your family welcome.

Why Target Families?

One in three households in Northern Ireland have a dependent child, and they are often actively looking for things to do as a family.

Families are also key to building future engagement. If a child experiences your venue or artform when they're young, they're likely to have more confidence to explore the arts again when they're older.

Families are one of the most discerning visitor types – they have a lot of needs to be met. But if you can truly deliver a great family experience, you're looking at a very loyal audience who will create invaluable word-of-mouth about your offer.

Programming

Once you've decided to actively welcome families, you'll need something for them to experience. It's time to look at your programming. You may be able to identify current strands of work that would attract families, or you may need to start developing a new offer.

Creating events specifically for kids and young people

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that kid-friendly content is low-quality (check out [Belfast Children's Festival](#) if you're in need of inspiration).

Programming for young audiences can be incredibly exciting and diverse. A [2018 report from ArtsConnect](#) shows that children aged 10 – 19 have a very wide-ranging idea of 'culture', that doesn't always reflect what the funded arts sector considers as culture. For them, it includes fashion, gaming, graffiti, skateboarding, and tattooing, along with visual arts, theatre, dance etc. There are clear opportunities for programming here in arts venues

and events. Interest and skills changes rapidly as children grow, so different age groups will need different experiences.

Case Study: Bambino

'[Bambino](#)' is a piece of opera designed especially for babies by Scottish Opera. The set and costumes are colourful and soft, and the babies could roam the set and interact with the performers.

"We wanted to make sure that in 25 years' time, if someone said, 'When did you see your first opera?' they would say, 'Oh - I was six months old'." - Phelim McDermott, Manchester International Festival

Identifying Opportunities in your Current Programme

Once someone becomes a parent – they still have all of the interests and hobbies that they did before. If you've got parts of your regular programme that would be suitable for kids, make a note of this in your brochure and website so that parents can attend, even if they have child-care responsibilities.

Case Study: Bradford Literature Festival

Bradford Literary Festival produced a special children's brochure with simple copy and pictures so children could attend events with their parents. The programme included colouring-in pages and other fun things to keep kids entertained while their parents got to enjoy the events.

Pricing

Families are always on the look-out for value, but that doesn't mean they will choose the cheapest option. Families usually have limited time to spend together, so they're often looking for a something that will entertain everyone for a full day, or at least an afternoon. If they know they're getting good quality and value, they'll be willing to pay.

A single mum may not have a lot of spare cash, but she's also very unlikely to have a lot of spare time either. Someone who is pressed for time is far less likely to take a chance on something they're unsure of – so programming and marketing work together to create value too.

Many museums and arts venues are already free, but a day out at the museum isn't free from a family perspective. Think about things like transport, food and drink, and a trip to the

gift shop. Think about other ways to ease the cost-pressure of attending an event. Providing a picnic space so that families can bring their own refreshments is a good idea. Some venues allow ticket-buyers to pre-purchase snacks and souvenirs along with pantomime tickets – so that families can see the full cost before they get there.

Normally family tickets are for 2 adults and 2 children which can exclude lone parent families or families with more or less than two children. Many parents have a preference for discounted child tickets instead of a family deal. The main thing to think about here is that there is a difference between price and value, particularly when it comes to families.

Case Study – ‘In the Night Garden’

During a tour of CBeebies ‘In the Night Garden’ theatre show, venues started getting complaints about the cost of balloons that were sold for £4. Rather than slash prices, they instead introduced an £8 balloon. Complaints disappeared and families were happy with the new ‘better value’ balloons.

Marketing and Online Communications

Families often spend a lot of time planning a day out. Make sure your website has all the practical information they need. Parents need information up-front: they want all their questions answered, quickly, and clearly. It’s better to be specific, as missing information may lead to a bad visitor experience, or they may not make the trip at all. For example, saying a show is ‘suitable for 6+’ isn’t true when a 13 year old would be bored by it.

Children are all different, so giving information allows parents to make their own decisions. Things like running times allow families to judge if an event or activity will hold their child’s attention.

Here are some things to think about when you’re writing something family-focused:

Event, Show, or Activity:

- Cost
- What specific age-range is it suitable for?
- Show duration, interval times, and end times.
- What is the latecomer policy?
- Are children welcome to make noise?
- Will they get messy?
- Will they have anything to bring home with them afterwards?

Venue or Festival:

- Is there a meet-up point?
- Transport and parking.
- Bathroom and changing facilities – accessible for all genders.
- Can you bring your own food and drink?
- Is it possible to heat up baby food and bottles?
- Is there a buggy carpark?
- Are all spaces accessible for wheelchairs or buggies?

Make sure your copy is appropriate for the event. Copy for families tends to be lighter than usual, but don't forget it's likely that adults will be the people reading it. Mothers are one of the biggest users of social media. 68% of mums use parenting sites and social media platforms for brand and product recommendations. Are your own social media profiles engaging and interesting for parents and mums in particular?

Word-of-mouth is incredibly important for families. There are things you can do to encourage good word-of-mouth, like having a presence on Facebook and TripAdvisor. But the most important things you can do is to really wow your family audiences, and create a first-class visitor experience.

Visitor Experience

Set the tone

Having comfy seating and chill-out zones throughout your venue send a message that people are welcome to linger in the venue and explore it on their own terms. Buggy parking or cloakrooms can literally lighten the load for parents and caregivers.

Consider your venue signage and notices. Are you setting the right tone, or telling people what not to do? Think about how those signs make customers feel or act.

What happens with latecomers to a family show? It can be hugely difficult to get adults and children to an event on time – is it family-friendly to then turn them away if they are late? If families have already purchased tickets, and are too late to see the performance, or can't make it at the last-minute, why not give them a comp to another show instead?

Staff Welcome

Above all, the most important part of visitor experience will be staff. For venue or event staff with no childcare experience, it can be daunting to know how to interact with children. Support your staff with training and guidance.

Empower your staff to commit 'Random Acts of Kindness' like free ice creams for a child visiting on their birthday. If a child has a tantrum or meltdown and won't go into the theatre or take part – let staff give parents a voucher to book another event instead.

Be Baby-Friendly

Make it clear that breastfeeding is welcome, and provide seating for this. Any business open to the public can join the '[Breastfeeding Welcome Here](#)' scheme. You'll get a sticker and certificate to display, and you'll be listed on their website too.

Providing free baby wipes or nappies in your bathrooms doesn't cost the earth, but can make a massive difference to a parent in need.

Getting there

Make sure family branded events are held at the right times. Matinee performances are great but if they are on weekdays think of school pickups and drop offs. This will help you plan when to post on social media too.

Food and Drink

If you have refreshments on-site there should be kid-friendly and healthy options available. Offer free drinking water and the ability to heat up baby food in microwaves.

Creating a picnic area allows families to save money by bringing their own food – and also takes care of any worries about fussy eaters.

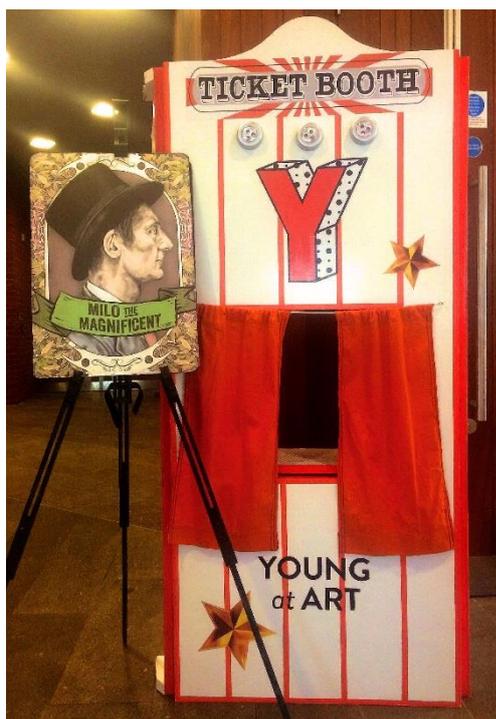
Take a Child's Eye View

Think about your visitor experience from the point of view of a child. Are there things to interest them at their eyeline? Lockers, ticket desks, bins, doorways... these can all be transformed into something fun and engaging for younger visitors. For older age groups, wifi, music, food and social spaces are key to engaging young people in having enjoyable experiences with their family and friends.

Case Study: Belfast Children's Festival

Each year the Belfast Children's Festival brings their pint-sized ticketing booth to their productions.

The colourful booth delights children, and lets them play an active part in getting their tickets checked before they go into the performance space and enjoy the show.



Check List

- Good quality family friendly activities and events are regularly programmed.
- Kid-friendly events clearly identified on your brochure or website.
- Visitor information and age-guidelines clear on your website.
- Copy is appropriate for kids and parents.
- Breastfeeding welcome.
- Opportunity to heat up milk or baby food.
- Performance times and intervals listed online
- Ticketing deals don't exclude specific family types.
- Families can be seen in your marketing.
- Staff are confident to help.
- Easy access for wheelchairs and buggies.
- Buggy storage
- Comfy seating
- Free wifi and water
- Bathrooms are clean and child-friendly with baby changing facilities for all genders.

More Support

If you'd like some one-to-one support to increase or diversify your family audiences, you can book in for a free [audience appointment](#). We also run research projects and create audience development strategies for a wide range of organisations. Check out our [products and services](#) to find out more.

Further Resources

Family Audiences Snapshot: <https://wewillthrive.co.uk/audience-insights/audience-snapshots/family-audiences-snapshot>

The Family Arts Campaign:
www.familyarts.co.uk

Reaching families online:
<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/blog/reaching-families-online>

Research on family audiences from the audience agency:
<http://www.familyarts.co.uk/2017/03/new-research-on-family-audiences-from-theaudience-agency-ace/>

Young at Art Relaxed Performances:
<http://www.youngatart.co.uk/access>