Crocker Art Museum’s

Tips for Tots

Museums are Fun!
In your child’s early years, it is important for parents and caregivers to provide opportunities for positive and playful interactions with caring adults and other children in a variety of settings.

Just like • zoos  
• aquariums  
• parks  
• and libraries,

art museums offer wonderful stimulation for babies, toddlers, and preschool-age children.
It is never too early to expose children to art, for this gives them a foundation for creativity and cultural appreciation that will nurture them for a lifetime.

Art museums are rich environments that can support healthy development and school-readiness.

By exploring the arts and art museums with your child you can deepen your relationship and increase your child’s social and emotional well-being. In this guide, you will find simple and easy ways to make your next art museum visit relaxing and fun!

The Crocker Art Museum is passionate about sharing arts experiences with people of all ages. We hope the following tips help you feel comfortable bringing young children, ages five and under, to the Crocker and other art museums.
Get Ready, Get Set, and Go!

Children, just like adults, like to be comfortable when exposed to new places, people, and activities.

How can you help your child get ready to enjoy a visit to the museum? ...

... read on ...
It helps if children are well-rested, not hungry, and comfortably dressed for movement, stroller-time, and air-conditioned spaces.

Make sure your tot’s basic needs are met.

If your child likes to take her or his time to adjust to a new setting, consider planning for some “warm up” time at the beginning of your museum visit:

- Enjoy a snack or lunch in one of the Crocker’s courtyards.
- Find a comfortable spot for breastfeeding.
- Talk with your child about what you expect to see in the museum.
- Give your child a chance to “get the wiggles out” before going to the galleries.
- Visit Tot Land.
If you will feel more comfortable with your child close to you, bring along a stroller or front carrier. (Many museums do not permit backpacks and back carriers because they can inadvertently damage art.)

Most of all—feel free to have child-like eyes and let your little one(s) guide the way.
Art Museums for Babies
(0-18 months)

It is true: Babies explore the world through their senses, which is why it is good to fill their environments with objects that are safe for them to grasp, taste, smell, and listen to.

ART-SMART NOTE
Do you know researchers have discovered that your child’s developing brain grows and expands every time you play together? Loving interaction promotes healthy brain development and emotional security.

Though babies do a lot of exploring with hands and mouth, eyes are key to much of their early learning. Vision helps infants build knowledge about the people and things around them. Think of art museums as wonderful visual learning laboratories!
Along with providing rich visual environments, art museums offer opportunities for you to strengthen the bond with your baby, sending and receiving messages and cues with both language and facial expressions.

While visiting an art museum, keep the following in mind:

**Slow things down to “baby time.”**
Take a leisurely stroll through the galleries, allowing time for your baby to see things and respond. Babies need time to process and integrate incoming information, especially if it is new.
More to keep in mind

Babies respond to images of faces, especially of babies or children.

Babies also respond to vividly colored abstract paintings.

Select a few works of art per visit to examine closely with your baby. Get comfortable, perhaps sit on a bench, talk to your child, tell a story, or sing a song.

Watch for your baby’s non-verbal cues and try to understand what is going on in her or his inner world. Respond with warmth and let your baby know that you understand.
Artistic Twos: Art Museums for Toddlers
(18 months to 3 years)

What has become known as the Terrible Twos is the developmental stage in which toddlers explore their independence through new-found mobility. At this stage, toddlers may occasionally express frustration while striving to use their emerging language skills.

Art museums are the perfect place to help build language skills and support toddlers in learning about their world through exploration and play.

Practice vocalization—There are many ways in which you can use art museums to introduce, reinforce, and activate words. If you see an artwork that looks like bursts of colors in the air, you might point to each and say, "Poof" or "Pop." See a cow in a painting — say, "Moo!" Encourage your child to repeat the sounds with you.
Explore your child’s special interests—perhaps birds, cars, animals, or flowers—on your next visit to an art museum. Take along a special, related toy or object for your child to hold, or search for in the artwork, during their visit.

For example, if your child enjoys cars, take along a small toy car. Repeat the words and build conversation about what can be seen in the artwork. Even if your baby is non-verbal, you can direct her or his attention by pointing things out and asking questions.

It’s hard for a toddler to sit still when he or she would rather be on the go, so be sure to engage with him or her. Take time to play and encourage conversation and active looking. Using a puppet or playing finger games works well in museum settings.
Along with visiting art museums, be sure to provide multisensory, age-appropriate art experiences at home so your child can enjoy the creative process of art making as well as looking at art. Non-toxic paints are best for little ones…. Or when you're outside, try painting the ground with water. All you need is a bucket of water and brushes—no clean-up required!

ART-SMART NOTE:
Did you know that young children derive greater benefits from pretend play when a close adult participates in the experience, offering new vocabulary, acting out different roles, as well as modeling active conversation and good social skills?
Preschool-age children are natural actors, scientists, inventors—and artists; so going to an art museum can be like finding kindred creative spirits! Use art museum visits as a way to support the learning of school-readiness concepts—like pattern identification, classification, number and space sense, color differentiation, and other primary learning skills.

Preschool-age children love going on an “art walk” in the museum when you make it fun for them!

Before your museum trip, build the excitement:
Discuss why art museums are special, what your child will see, and what kind of behavior you expect of your child in a museum setting.
Take your time in the galleries, moving at a leisurely pace. Let your child guide where you will go and what you will see. If something catches her or his eye, stop and talk about it. Encourage your child to identify the emotional expressions she or he sees on people depicted in artwork (sad, happy, excited, etc.). Make up stories about what’s going on in the artwork.
Don’t underestimate your child’s capacity for discussing artwork or soaking up new vocabulary. Have full conversations with your preschooler. Ask questions, listen to what your child is saying, and validate his or her input into the conversation. Take time to repeat back or paraphrase what your child says. Help your child to identify types of art (painting, sculpture, photograph, or drawing) and use descriptive words for the art she or he sees (“bumpy,” “sweet,” “funny,” etc.).

Play games with your preschool-age child. You might ask your child to hunt for different colors, shapes, lines, or patterns. Pre-cut specific shapes (like a triangle or an oval) and have your child hold the shapes as she or he searches for them in the artwork.

If your child likes the color yellow, bring something yellow and look for the color yellow in art. Extend the activity with questions that invite open-ended responses, “Yes, that is yellow. What do you think she is doing with those yellow shoes?”
Invite another family to visit the museum with you so that your child can learn along with a friend how to visit an art museum.

At home, encourage symbolic or pretend play using the museum as a “make-believe” setting—provide props and see what happens!

Most of all, let your children “come as they are.” If this means wearing a big purple frog costume to the museum—great! We look forward to seeing you at the Crocker.

ART-SMART NOTE
Did you know that researchers found that five-year-olds who were able to accurately match emotions to facial expressions had more advanced social skills and higher academic achievement when they reached age nine than children who were unable or challenged in reading the emotions on people’s faces? Children with stronger understanding of emotions also showed fewer behavior problems.
My Kid’s Art
The Crocker Art Museum is dedicated to promoting an awareness of and enthusiasm for human experience through art.

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