

Suggestions for Maintaining Good Behavior on School Field Trips

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Student misbehaviors on field trips is a problem more often suffered by than remediated by museums/zoos. Good behavior on the part of students is not merely an accident or a miracle bestowed on those free from sin. What can museums/zoos do about such behavior? The application of some basic behavior management skills usually solves the majority of problems. I offer a few suggestions based on my previous life as a child psychologist.

Suggestions

1. Make clear to students how they are expected to behave on the field trip. Written instructions are preferred since they will result in fewer misunderstandings about what was really said. The museum can provide such instructions to schools along with other pre-visit materials. It is important that the rules for behavior and the reasons for the rules are explained. In addition to specifying expected behavior, it is important to make clear the consequences of misbehavior. Decide beforehand how problems will be dealt with, thus eliminating the need for spur-of-the-moment decisions.

2. Provide a written agenda to students and teachers detailing what events will occur and when. It should be clear when students will eat lunch, visit the gift shop, etc. Knowledge of the agenda will decrease some of the anxieties and agitations of what will happen next.

3. Reward good behavior. The museum/zoo can provide special experiences if the school group behaves. The classroom teachers can also be encouraged to reward students who behave by praise, if nothing more.

4. Keep students involved. If students are actively involved in learning they are less likely to misbehave than if they are idly waiting in line.

5. Insist on close and adequate supervision. One teacher cannot supervise 50 young children adequately. Museums and zoos can insist that there is a reasonable student-teacher ratio.

6. Provide written instructions for adult chaperones. Teachers and other adult chaperones do not always know what they should do to keep students under control. Often, teachers provide an inappropriate model for students. We have seen teachers wander off while a docent is talking with students. Soon students start to follow their teacher.

Conclusions

These suggestions won't eliminate all problems, but they should go a long way to prevent many of the common ones. Remember that the key to success is good planning.

Visitor Behavior
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