

# Family Friendly Toolkit



Arts Council England works to get more art to more people in more places. We develop and promote the arts across England, acting as an independent body at arm's length from government.

Between 2006 and 2008, we will invest £1.1 billion of public money from government and the National Lottery in supporting the arts. This is the bedrock of support for the arts in England.

We believe that the arts have the power to change lives and communities, and to create opportunities for people throughout the country.

Cover image: Skelly Night, Ramsgate by Brigitte Orasinski, © Strange Cargo.

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# Introduction

There is huge potential for the arts to contribute to family life through shared entertainment, leisure and learning. These experiences can play a vital role in developing lifelong participation in the arts.

There is no simple definition of family or family friendly. Arts Council England believes that the definition of the family unit should be broad and inclusive given that individuals and organisations have different definitions for different purposes. Today there are many legal, formal and informal relationships which people recognise as a family unit. Some family units may be contained in a single household with two parents, others may have extended families, intergenerational family units, step- or foster families, single-parent families, families in which parents do not reside together and many other combinations.

Arts Council England has been working for the past two years in partnership with Network, the national body for regional audience development agencies in the UK to develop a national family friendly framework for the arts. We both aim to encourage family friendly work within the arts and want to support arts organisations to improve their offer to families.

This practical toolkit is a major part of the ongoing work. We would like to thank our family friendly coordinator Louise Cogman for her support to us and her hard work and dedication in producing this first edition.

This toolkit is designed to support arts organisations wishing to make a commitment to families, making it easier for families to take part in the arts, as audiences and participants. Aimed at arts professionals and drawing on extensive research and interviews, the toolkit contains experiences and examples of good practice from many arts organisations to help develop work for families.

It also provides:

- an introduction to the concept of being a family friendly organisation
- an audit to assess how you support families
- tools for getting started
- facts and figures about the family audience
- tried and tested ideas to develop your work

You can read the toolkit from start to finish or dip in to find guidelines and illustrations of good practice to help with specific areas of your work. You can use the toolkit as a starting point and add items that will be particularly relevant to you.

We would welcome feedback from you.

Let us know what elements of the toolkit you found useful or if you have further suggestions which may help others when we update this edition.

We would particularly like to hear about your experiences, the successes and challenges, of trying to become more family friendly.

You can email us at: [philip.cave@arts council.org.uk](mailto:philip.cave@arts council.org.uk)  
or Joanna Davies at: [Joanna@audienceswales.co.uk](mailto:Joanna@audienceswales.co.uk)

**Phil Cave, Director,  
Participation Strategy, Arts Council England**

**Joanna Davies,  
Network Chair and Chief Executive, Audiences Wales**

# How to use this toolkit

## **1 Getting started: the guiding principles**

We suggest everyone reads the guiding principles first. Use them to stimulate debate about how your organisation supports families and to raise awareness of what it means. Any organisation can be family friendly, although touring organisations and non-venue based companies may have to work harder with presenting partners.

## **2 Assess your family friendliness: the audit**

The family friendly audit is a practical tool with sample templates and discussion points to get you started and guide your development work. If you carry out an audit you can:

- assess your current levels of family friendliness
- identify areas for improvement
- work with colleagues to overcome hurdles and find solutions
- increase awareness of what makes an organisation family friendly
- lay the foundations for your policy and action plan

## **3 Prepare for action: a family friendly policy and action plan**

Having completed your audit and arming yourself with the guiding principles, use the toolkit contents to help write a policy and action plan. A policy to make your organisation family friendly works best when it is part of your core work. Use the action plan template to:

- identify priorities for action
- establish a timetable for continuing development
- assign responsibility within the team
- use resources effectively
- incorporate monitoring and feedback

## **4 Get ideas, advice and information: communication and further reading**

The toolkit can support you in identifying opportunities to consult and engage with families, and help you with ideas for training, projects and ongoing work.

# Guiding principles

## Introduction

These guiding principles identify the main things you should address when thinking about making your organisation family friendly. They have been developed from research into the needs of families and from good practice among arts organisations already working to be family friendly.

These principles can help you decide whether this approach to being family friendly is the right way forward. They offer an overview to inform your policy and planning. However, they are not a checklist for self-assessment. This toolkit includes sample audits and case studies to illustrate practical application of the guiding principles and guidance on other areas such as safety.

## The guiding principles

### ***A commitment to families throughout the organisation is essential***

All staff and volunteers need to understand and sign up to being family friendly. You may need to brief visiting performers, artists and activity leaders. An important part of this commitment is a wholehearted acceptance of, and involvement with, families by people who have direct contact with the public.

### ***A family friendly approach works best when it is within an organisation's core work***

It is good to have a policy and action plan. Feedback and evaluation are vital to keeping your organisation family friendly. Many organisations appeal to more than one type of audience and their programme may not be family friendly all the time, so it is important to be explicit about what you can offer families.

### ***The whole experience is very important for family visitors***

For families, often more than for anyone else, the journey to and from the venue, feeling welcome (or not), refreshments and merchandise all contribute to whether they will return. An unhappy child or stressed adult is likely to result in disappointment and an early exit. Think about arrival, orientation, layout, comfort, atmosphere, interpretation and feedback. Are you flexible enough to deal with anything unforeseen?

***Safety is a key issue***

An organisation that is family friendly will make families aware that their safety has been considered and appropriate measures have been put in place. A child protection policy is compulsory.

***Give families honest information in the right format***

Families need us to help them make an informed choice and plan their visit.

It is helpful to put all the information they need in one place.

***Family is a flexible term***

Family groups come in all sizes and age ranges. Grandparents, other relatives and carers are often part of a family group. Families like events and activities that are interesting to all age ranges so they can enjoy them together.

***Plan continuing provision***

Ongoing, rather than ad hoc programming helps demonstrate commitment and is more likely to encourage loyalty and confidence among family audiences.

***Suitability of product is a key factor***

Being family friendly does not mean 'dumbing down' or compromising artistic values. The aim is work that can be enjoyed by all ages, so think about content, presentation and opportunities for shared appreciation.

***Quality of product is important***

Families know if they are being fobbed off with something that is inferior and are often especially conscious of value for money.

***Physical interaction is important for children***

If the environment seems too fragile or hostile to touch or interact with, parents might be reluctant to risk a visit. However, parents appreciate sensitive presentation of vulnerable collections to help teach respect.

***Social interaction and shared enjoyment plays a critical role in shaping the visit***

An important part of the visit will be conversations between family members. It should be actively encouraged because it can be pivotal to a visit that is enjoyable and satisfying. Adults often appreciate help to start such conversations.



# Family friendly audit

This audit is a practical tool, which you can use to assist the planning of your family friendly work. It can:

- raise your awareness of the needs of family visitors and audiences
- prompt discussion about how you can best meet these needs
- enable self-assessment of your current family friendliness
- help you identify improvements you can make

No audit can provide a failsafe or exhaustive checklist and using it does not certify family friendliness. Your location, building and programme may make it impossible for you to provide everything, but it is often possible to find creative solutions to meet the need in a different way.

Each organisation will decide how best to develop an approach to being family friendly based on the programme and services it offers, where it is situated and its resources. It's best if everyone understands and is involved in the process, so the audit is a good starting point for all staff.

We have structured the audit section into four main areas:

- access and facilities
- programming
- marketing and communication
- customer care

We have provided sample templates and accompanying notes, questions and illustrations to stimulate discussion and ideas. It is also helpful to use this audit in conjunction with the guiding principles.

The next step after an audit will ideally be a family friendly action plan, which sets out what you want to do to improve and maintain your relationship with families.

# Access and facilities

	In place	In place, but needs improvement or updating	Planned for future	No or not available	Comments
Parking on site					
Public transport stops nearby					
Ease of access					
External sign posting					
Internal sign posting					
Family catering					
Baby changing					
Clean visitor toilets					
Seating and rest areas					
Shop has suitable stock					
Ability to take a number of family visits at a time					

## Audit notes:

### Access and facilities

Families need to plan all aspects of the visit. Do a 'walk-through' to assess how easily they can reach you. Can they easily park or arrive by public transport and find where they need to be?

Is parking free and onsite? If not, is a public car park nearby and is it free or paid? Is there parent and child and disabled parking? How far is the walk from the car park?

Can people get to you by bus or train and are there convenient stops nearby? Can you provide information numbers for local transport services?

Does local signposting make it easy to find you? Do you have internal signposting? Will it enable families to locate what they need? Could you include symbols and arrows at child-friendly height?

Easy physical access often means the same provision you make for disabled audiences: flat-floor access, ramps, lifts, automatic doors. If you welcome a lot of small children you can also consider low-level handrails and shallow steps.

Simple adjustments can make your catering more family friendly, however basic or sophisticated the facilities. Consider children's menus, healthy options, affordable snacks, baby food, highchairs, free water, crayons and paper, no smoking area, small plastic cups for small hands.

Making sure the toilets are clean seems obvious but the lack of these can be a major source of dissatisfaction. If you can't get a pushchair into the toilets, is there somewhere adjacent to leave it? Could you provide stools or child-height facilities? Nappy changing facilities are much appreciated, especially if they are unisex and might simply involve providing a clean mat and pot of wipes.

Family outings can be tiring. Seating and rest areas for both adults and children can provide a welcome pause. If you have the space, soft furniture is great and a safe play area (inside or out) enables little ones to let off excess energy.

Is your organisation explicit about welcoming families? Some organisations have developed a family corner or noticeboard to give a particular focus to families and their interests. If you don't have control over the building where you present your family events, could you persuade whoever does to make some improvements?

If you have a shop, stock good quality small items which can be bought with pocket money as souvenirs and treasures to take home.

Don't become a victim of your own success! Can your venue, facilities, staff cope with several families at the same time?

# Programming

In place	In place, but needs improvement or updating	Planned for future	No or not available	Comments
Programming for families included in artistic policy and business plan				
Policy includes culturally diverse programming				
Opportunities for interactive and hands-on activities				
Interpretation and information aimed at families				
Year-round and continuing provision for families				
Programme presented in suitable ways				
Events and activities suit a wide age range				
Family friendly timing				

## Audit notes:

### Programming

Is programming for families part of your core work, identified in your organisation's key policies and strategic plans? Is the main focus children's work or work which can be appreciated by all ages? If you offer workshops, are they children-only or intergenerational?

Many arts organisations plan half-term shows and pantomime as income earners. Will additional programming for families require adjustments to financial planning?

Do you need to talk to visiting companies, artists, workshop leaders about creating and providing work that families can see and participate in?

If your current programming is limited to ad hoc school holiday events or a fixed Saturday morning slot, can you develop it to be a more regular event?

Does your programme cater for culturally diverse families? All families share the same needs but some Black and Asian families, for example, may have different requirements. The family friendly approach can be a useful way of reaching some of the audiences who currently have low take-up of arts activity.

Families may have members with disabilities or learning difficulties to consider, so your disability action plan will overlap with and benefit your provision for families.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. The age range in some groups might spread across seven decades. In the case of stepfamilies, the merging of two family groups might mean big gaps between children's ages. Sometimes, family members pair up to pursue shared interests rather than all attend together. So programming for families can take many forms and the most important thing is that different ages can enjoy the arts together.

Hands-on activities are great for involving children and enabling families to explore something together. Interactive exhibits are popular, but don't need to be expensive. Interactive displays, foyer trails, audience participation and games are always welcome.

Parents and carers are sometimes daunted by the prospect of having to explain things. What can you provide to enhance their interpretation and understanding of your event or activity? Quizzes, treasure trails, easy guides, art carts, specially prepared programme notes can ease the anxiety and increase the shared enjoyment. Educational content is appreciated.

Small adjustments to presentation can easily make an event more family friendly. Artworks on plinths or at child-friendly height, alternative labelling, reserved seating with good sightlines, room for booster seats, and extending the fun or educational content can all make a family visit more worthwhile. Timing your events for families might mean weekends, holidays, after school, matinees, early evening or even day time for those with pre-school age children.

# Marketing and communication

	In place	In place, but needs improvement or updating	Planned for future	No or not available	Comments
Families identified in marketing strategy					
Marketing activity specially targeted at families					
Marketing methods are those preferred by families					
Maps, directions, useful transport links included in publicity					
Competitions, give-aways, special offers – to add value					
Family tickets and deals					
Data about family attendees collected					
Do you or could you collaborate with other organisations to attract families?					



## Audit notes:

# Marketing and communication

If family programming is part of your organisation's core artistic strategy and business plan, it makes sense to include families as a key target market in your marketing or audience development strategy.

Research shows that one of the most effective steps you can take to be family friendly is to create special marketing for families. Print, web-based, brochures, direct mail, listings, magazines – you'll need to find out which works best, but the key thing is that all the information they need is in one place. Families are usually time poor and don't want to search out information from several sources. They do like having something that has been created specially for them – it immediately sends out signals that you cater for families across your organisation.

Families need honest and clear information on your event so they can make an informed judgement about whether it is suitable. Add ticket prices, travel and parking information, event duration, and a checklist of facilities available to make it really helpful.

Families are cost-conscious, but also think in terms of value for money, so might be willing to pay more for something that provides a whole day out. They will resent hidden costs (for example, a general admission charge, but no mention of the additional charge for a special interactive exhibition). Think about family tickets and discounts; if you are using the two adults and two children model, how many of your family visitors actually fit that model? Are the ones that don't staying away?

Families will respond to competitions, special offers and deals. You could try coupons or special promotions with family-orientated partners such as supermarkets, visitor attractions or leisure centres.

Can you find ways to add value? Competitions, give-aways, add-on items can make a difference. Free badges and stickers are popular and could increase the feeling of belonging.

How much do you know about the families in your area and the families that attend? For many organisations, the only data they have is the number of family tickets sold as a percentage of all sales. How could you collect more useful data and how will this help develop your relationship with families?

Consider collaborative publicity with other family friendly organisations in your area – it will reduce the costs for you and improve the service for families. Collaboration could extend beyond marketing to programming, staff training and consultation.

# Customer care

	In place	In place, but needs improvement or updating	Planned for future	No or not available	Comments
Staff equipped to welcome family visitors					
All staff have disability awareness training					
Customer experience thought through from start to finish					
Children are listened to as well as adults					
Dialogue encouraged between staff and family visitors; feedback used					
Child Protection Policy					
Other health and safety issues covered					
Families are consulted					

## Audit notes:

### Customer care

A family friendly policy works best when all staff understand and are committed to the aims. Staff need to feel confident about their contribution. Do you need training, briefings and induction procedures to support them?

Disability awareness training will help staff welcome a range of attendees, including family groups where one or more has a disability. This type of awareness training can usually be applied to a range of situations, contributing to all-round customer care.

In the section on access and facilities, it is suggested you do a walk-through to assess the ease with which families can reach your venue or event. You can extend this approach to assess their whole experience and identify any potential blackspots: buying tickets, what to do with the buggy, needing to go out in the middle of the performance, getting correct information on activities and facilities, accessing special family activities such as free workshops, art carts or give-aways – how can your staff go the extra mile to make families feel really welcome?

Knowing your family attendees, why they come and why they don't puts you in a stronger position to give them the best possible welcome. Consultation can take many forms: surveys and questionnaires, user groups, customer circles, comment cards. If family attendees are encouraged to talk to staff, the feedback could be invaluable and families will feel they are listened to. Playtrain is an organisation which specialises in consulting children and some arts organisations have employed them to deliver training.

Safety is a big issue for families. Families are more likely to feel comfortable if it is evident that you have given proper consideration to it. If you don't already have one, put together a Child Protection Policy. Other things to think about include lost children procedure, clearly marked meeting point, unmanned exit doors onto busy roads, secure outdoor areas and 'hidden' dangers like glass doors and slippery floors.

# Writing a family friendly policy

## **Introduction**

The guiding principles for improving services for families give general guidance and support across the arts sector. Your organisation can implement them within the context of your overall vision and objectives and within the resources available to you.

The diversity of arts organisations and what they can offer families is one of the sector's strengths. However, while it is acknowledged that each organisation's programmes for families may vary in some of the detail, the commitment to the overall ethos and to high standards for all aspects of a family's experience must be maintained. We all stand or fall by each other's standards because our overall success depends upon families' trust in and continuing experience of our consistent efforts to improve our services for them.

## **Why have a policy?**

Arts organisations are required to prepare many policies these days. Some, such as child protection and disability access policies, are compulsory for regularly funded organisations. Why add a non-compulsory family friendly policy to the list?

Recent examples of good practice have demonstrated repeatedly that family friendly policies are at their most successful when the commitment runs throughout the organisation. Certainly it needs involvement at chief executive and artistic director level and endorsement by the board. Having a written policy is a good way of demonstrating that commitment, within the organisation and to people outside. It also safeguards the organisation's investment by avoiding the situation where one staff member takes sole responsibility for the family friendly policy and all the learning and impetus disappears if they leave.

## **What sort of policy?**

Each organisation should decide what format is most useful to them. The policy might be a very succinct document which summarises the organisation's approach to being family friendly; others may prefer a document with short sections to deal with different areas of policy: artistic policy, operational issues, staff training and approach to the family market, for instance.

Alternatively, information relating to the organisation's family friendly policy might already be evident within an overarching artistic policy or business plan. The policy might also appear in a public version such as a promise to families, displayed within a venue or in an organisation's marketing communications.

### **Pointers to developing a family friendly policy**

There are no hard and fast rules to formulating a policy, but the following suggestions might help you to decide the best process for your organisation.

- Decide who will write the final version – this is likely to be the organisation's director or chief executive
- Consider the value of a working group where each member is responsible for gathering information and evidence to inform different aspects of the policy
- If the organisation is just starting to consider introducing a programme for families it might be difficult to write a policy straight away. It might be more useful to appoint a team to do some preliminary work, using the guiding principles and audit, so that you can identify the areas on which to focus, using the outcomes to inform your policy
- Some organisations have found it valuable to test aspects of the intended programme for families and assess the results, including the reactions of families, before formalising it in a policy

### **Suggested areas for policy development**

The checklist below suggests some areas your organisation might want to explore in order to develop and finalise its family friendly policy. It is not a list of 'must haves' and it is unlikely that all of them will be relevant for every organisation. The best policy documents are often short and can be quickly and easily understood. Detail relating to planning and development can go in supporting documents.

- Definition of family – Arts Council England uses a wide definition of 'family'; it recognises the family as a group which includes at least one adult and one child. Some organisations choose to focus on particular types of family groups, for instance, those who don't currently attend
- Artistic policy – do you need to look at existing work to see how it can be made more accessible to families or extend programming to increase the regular offer to families; is your provision building based – or taking work out to the community?

- Product – sourcing, testing, commissioning – what are your options?
- Promoters, venues, visiting performers and artists – to what extent do you need to involve them?
- Motivation, ethos – why is your organisation choosing to be family friendly?
- Local and national government policy and priorities – are you aware of current agendas? How does your work to improve your service for families relate to these?
- Your local community – how do you relate to the families in your locality? Who uses your provision and who does not?
- Positioning – what do you provide in relation to other things available for families in your area?
- Social inclusion and audience development goals – what are your goals and those of your funders or stakeholders?
- Partnerships and relationships with other family orientated agencies – for advice, information and collaboration
- A holistic approach sustaining family friendliness in all parts of the organisation, maintaining commitment; this might cover operational issues
- Safety – the detail will depend upon your organisation, but carers will be reassured by an organisation that has thought through the issues which include: lost child policy, child protection, a children’s charter, staff training, health and safety for staff and visitors
- Staff and volunteers – training and supporting the essential resource

You can be sure of one thing: family is a subject on which everyone has a view and inevitably organisations with family programmes can encounter tensions and challenges around people’s different opinions. Your family friendly policy will be valuable as an explicit and positive statement of your aims.

Families, education and the arts are all intensely political subjects that everyone has an opinion on and a project of this nature calls into question people’s fundamental values and belief systems. (Blackfriars Arts Centre Family Friendly Initiative, Learning Point, New Audiences evaluation)

### **Legal guidance**

There are some legal issues of which you need to be aware when working with children, young people and families. *Keeping Arts Safe* was written by Arts Council England in collaboration with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It includes guidance on child protection issues and devising policies and procedures to protect children,

young people and vulnerable adults involved in arts activities.  
Available to order free of charge from:

Marston Book Services Ltd  
PO Box 269  
Abingdon  
Oxon  
OX14 4YN  
Phone: 01235 465500  
Email: [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk)  
Fax: 01235 465555  
or download free from [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Workshop leaders, creche workers and anyone else working with young people now need a disclosure check. Organisations can register with the Criminal Records Bureau to carry out these checks directly or go through an agency. You will find more information at the Criminal Records Bureau at: **[www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk)**

Article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a useful reference point for any organisation developing a family friendly approach:

1 parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2 parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

You can see the full text of the Convention at **[www.unicef.org./crc/fulltext.htm](http://www.unicef.org./crc/fulltext.htm)**

#### **Definitions: family and family friendly**

Arts Council England states that the definition of the family unit should be broad and inclusive. It recognises the family as a group which includes at least one adult and one child.

Here are some examples of what defines a venue or approach that encourages working with families:



Child and family friendly... venues (are those) in which children, young people and their families and carers feel comfortable and welcomed ... demonstrated in the physical space and its facilities, and in the attitude of staff. Family... takes full account of the multiplicity of legal and informal relationships which can exist between a group of people terming themselves 'A family'. (Sarah Argent, Research Study, 2000)

The definition of family is extremely broad – encompassing any relationship or combination of relationships between adults and children of any ages attending theatre as a group (minimum one adult and one child). (Theatre for Families)

Partner organisations were particularly interested in the development of intergenerational activities. These activities aim to create a satisfying experience for children and adults that inspires mutual learning, and new conversations and approaches to planning family visits.

# Action plan

## Why have an action plan?

Any project or developmental work benefits from having a plan. It will need the commitment of people to make it happen but there are several advantages to having a plan on paper:

- the information is in one place for the whole team to access whenever they need it
- it is a confirmation of the commitment your organisation has made
- it sets out what you want to do, what you have to do it with, and who will do it, so you do not need to keep having the same discussions
- if there are staff changes, new members have a clear reference for the organisation's commitment to families
- it provides a timescale for objectives so that the team can work realistically towards achieving them
- the plan enables you to monitor progress and tick off your achievements or to make adjustments as appropriate

An action plan should be a help not a hindrance. Compiled correctly it will drive your project forward. Put it together after you have completed a family friendly audit and a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis (SWOT) with colleagues. Be specific about what needs to be done.

## Action plan contents

What goes into your action plan is up to you. Include the information that will give you the advantages described above. It is good to keep it brief because it is more likely to be used. Detailed information such as records of team meetings and decisions or consultation findings should be kept elsewhere, in a resource file or in an appendix. As a minimum, your plan is likely to include:

- overall aim
- individual objectives
- specific actions that have been agreed to achieve the objectives
- initials of team members assigned to specific actions and tasks
- dates by which actions should be completed or achieved
- resources required to complete the action

- a built-in process of monitoring, for example, dates for quarterly team meetings and reporting to your board or trustees

You may want to keep brief notes alongside actions or objectives where the team needs a reminder of relevant information, for example, an external agency's funding application timetable or the requirement to gain a minimum three quotes for new equipment.

Objectives should always be 'smart':

- specific
- measurable
- actionable
- realistic
- timetabled

Your organisation may prefer to include its objectives for working with families within an overall business plan. The same guidelines apply and you need to ensure that all team members can access the information easily. In any case, your action plan needs to match what your organisation has set out in its artistic policy and financial plans. In fact, giving family friendliness a specific mention in both these documents is a positive start to demonstrating the organisation's commitment to this work.

### **The process**

As the examples which follow illustrate, the action plan is a straightforward document. The process by which it is put together will contribute to its effectiveness as a working document. The objectives need to be agreed by the team and individual members need to understand and feel confident about the strategies and actions that they have responsibility for.

The guiding principles and audit included in this toolkit will assist the process of making these decisions together. Use the guiding principles to stimulate discussion about the big issues and how these relate to your organisation. Use the audit to assess your current family friendliness and identify areas for development and improvement.

Schedule two or three meetings to complete this process. Ensure that each meeting has an agenda and outcomes so that discussion translates into decision. This process will help your team narrow down your objectives and agree how to

achieve them. It is unlikely that everything will happen quickly. Have a realistic timetable which includes improvements you can make swiftly and easily as well as strategies that take longer and tasks which require greater resources.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

It is easier (and more satisfying) to measure progress if you build in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Choose the method that suits you such as a team meeting, a verbal or written report or simply tick off actions completed and reassess tasks and deadlines as needed. This is the part of the process that people are tempted to forgo, but your action plan is more likely to stay on course if you monitor it. It also gives you the opportunity to make adjustments in the light of unforeseen events to keep the action plan up to date. Also, celebrating progress is good for everyone!

## **Sample template**

On the next page you will find a sample template that you can use 'off the shelf' or adapt to suit your needs. The action plans on the following pages show you examples of how the template has been adapted to suit other organisation's specific needs. These examples show how two organisations used an action plan in the early stages of their family friendly work.

# Family friendly action plan: sample template

## Action plan

Objective	Strategies, actions and tasks	Lead team member(s)	Other staff involved	Resources required	External partners	Deadline for completion

## Monitoring and evaluation

Objective	Date	Team members	External partners	Outcome

# Sample action plan - 1a

Objectives	Tactics and approaches	Timescale	Evaluation
<p>To develop the relationship with our core audience, and to find out more about their characteristics and motivations</p>	<p>Introduce a membership scheme targeted at frequently attending families, which would promote ownership and encourage social interaction through exclusive access to family days</p> <p>A questionnaire to determine demographics, motivations and habits to be included in membership welcome pack</p>	<p>To be launched autumn 2006</p>	<p>An informal discussion group made up of families who participated in these family days</p> <p>Questionnaires</p>
<p>Increasing the frequency of attendance in these core families, with an emphasis on attendance at new and experimental work</p>	<p>Membership will also give ticket discounts to subscribers, which can be varied depending on the 'difficulty' of the show</p>	<p>Autumn 2006</p>	<p>Box office sales data</p>
<p>To increase first-timer family reattendance from 20 percent over a year to 35 percent</p>	<p>Each first-timer to receive a welcome pack with their tickets, showing them the facilities on offer. These families will also be followed up with a letter after their visit, with an offer for a future show, and also a questionnaire asking them for feedback on their first visit. An informal first-timer focus group, drawn from local families, will also address issues of customer retention</p>	<p>Welcome packs and follow-up letters from autumn 2006</p> <p>Discussion group to meet in spring 2007</p> <p>Included in the autumn 2006 season</p>	<p>Sales analysis and customer feedback through questionnaires</p>

# Sample action plan - 1b

Objectives	Tactics and approaches	Timescale	Evaluation
<p>To encourage inter-generational activity</p>	<p>The introduction of family drama workshops, which involve both adult and child participation. These are followed by a visit to a show included in the price of tickets</p>	<p>Included in the autumn 2006 season</p>	<p>Attendance levels and customer feedback through both adult and child questionnaires</p>
<p>To investigate the success of the 'Watch with baby' (Wwbb) performances and determine the impact of the 'no under fours' rule in the main theatre on audience levels</p>	<p>Telephone interviews with Wwbb bookers to establish how they heard, why they booked and what they thought</p> <p>Obtain feedback from FOH staff and actors as to the feasibility of more performances with babies in the audience</p>	<p>August 2006</p>	<p>Audience and artist feedback</p>
<p>Increase baby friendliness of the building for Wwbb shows (subject to these performances being determined as desirable)</p>	<p>Supply free nappies and wet wipes in the baby changing room and possibly even baby food. Seek a commercial sponsor (Boots or Mothercare, for example, to sponsor the Wwbb performances)</p>	<p>By spring 2006</p>	<p>Customer questionnaires</p>

# Sample action plan - 1c

Objectives	Tactics and approaches	Timescale	Evaluation
To create a new audience for teenage work	Use the existing youth theatres and youth forum to act as ambassadors for the teenage work, possibly by setting up an incentives scheme for those ambassadors who refer the most young people to the box office	November 2006 in preparation for January 2007	Box office 'how did you hear?' data
To enlarge Black and Asian family audience to 5 percent	Diverse audiences are achieved through school groups. Put into place a scheme where each child who visits as part of a (targeted) school group goes home with a welcome pack, introducing the parent to the theatre and providing a ticket discount for a future visit	Spring 2007	Take up on ticket offer



# Sample action plan - 2a

Objectives	Strategies and approaches	Timescale	Evaluation
<p>To become more informed about interest from the press in family friendly work, and to find new ways to increase our profile through the press</p>	<p>Organise a meeting with local newspaper</p> <p>Use a profile as a selling point. Make a specific targeted approach on this basis</p>	<p>Contact BC early June. Meeting when convenient</p> <p>Integrate this in each press campaign from now on</p>	<p>Use any info gained for Finders Keepers and monitor responses from new contacts</p> <p>Monitor press coverage</p>
<p>To be more pro active in questioning / advising venues for our touring shows on family friendly issues</p>	<p>Revisit and expand information sent to venues before show tours to them. Make sure it is sent wider than the marketing department</p>	<p>Implement for tour spring</p>	<p>Informal feedback from touring team. Try to have wider family friendly discussions with venues we tour to, to ascertain their commitment and any issues</p>
<p>To find out more about the interaction between child and parent, after the show, which can be triggered by an artistic experience</p>	<p>Create an object, given to families in next production, and undertake qualitative research as to how families respond to and use the object</p>	<p>Production A: October Research: November or early December</p>	<p>Feedback forms</p> <p>Focus group</p>

# Sample action plan - 2b

Objectives	Tactics and approaches	Timescale	Evaluation
To examine our use of publicity images in relation to attracting families	Advise on use of existing images to co-producers.	Immediate: we have advised Vienna Festival on careful use of press images	Strength of family audiences in Vienna
Explore the practical implications of moving up a scale in the production of family friendly work	Carefully consider accessibility of images we create for Production A  Apply for general manager to attend 'raising the stakes' course. If unsuccessful – talk to a consultant	Image in July  Apply when forms come out	Talk to families in feedback group  The results of the exploration will be evident according to the decisions we make about the scale of our future work

# Communication

This section of the toolkit deals with the broad topic of communication and includes information about:

- welcoming families
- customer care
- staff training
- consultation with families

There are separate sections in the toolkit about:

- marketing to families
- audience development
- research and data

## **Welcoming families**

A warm and friendly welcome is important to all attendees, so why make a particular point of it in terms of your relationship with families?

Research indicates consistently that the welcome is what families value most. Feeling comfortable and relaxed goes a long way to ensuring the success of their visit. Sometimes, an expression on the face of a staff member in response to a question can be enough to put people off. Families also fear the reactions of other visitors so the provision of, for example, a family corner in the cafe can make them feel more comfortable among other non-family attendees.

Many arts organisations have high quality customer care and are viewed as accessible and welcoming. The important thing is to sustain your welcome and evaluate it on a regular basis so that you can make appropriate improvements. Killhope Mining Museum in County Durham won the Guardian's Kids in Museums award in 2004. Ian Forbes, the museum's manager, said that he thought they won not because of their policies but because his staff are so welcoming. The museum places significant emphasis on recruitment, training and continuing personal and professional development.

The Theatre for Families project in the southeast helped venues develop their family welcome. It included an awards campaign which encouraged families to vote for the most family friendly theatre. The families' comments illustrate how the welcome makes a difference:

Every time I enter with my wife and seven kids, I am always greeted by the nicest people. (Audience member, Orchard Theatre, Dartford)

The staff working at the box office are all lovely, charming, helpful and good fun too. Nothing is ever too much trouble and they always offer helpful suggestions and alternatives if tickets are sold out. (Emailed vote for Komedia, Brighton)

I went there with my four-year-old nephew and he was treated with the same amount of respect as I was. (Audience member, Eastbourne Theatres)

### **Top tips to ensure a family friendly welcome**

- greet with a smile (a cliché but true and does not cost anything!)
- display a public statement of family friendliness – a promise or charter
- provide consistently clean and well looked after facilities
- have well-briefed staff willing to answer questions and assist
- build in flexibility – the ability to deal with unforeseen events or incidents
- create a building or space that looks like it welcomes families
- be able to cope with multiple family visits, other visitors and manage crowds

### **Customer care**

Good customer care in an organisation that is family friendly needs to be considered before and beyond the welcome described above. To make sure that families have the best possible experience you will have covered their needs before they have even arrived and thought about how you can make it a trip they will talk about enthusiastically after they have returned home.

Everyone in your organisation should be aware of how they can contribute to the welcome for families. In many cases it is your frontline staff and those who have direct contact with families who carry this responsibility on a day to day basis. Provide training to raise their awareness of the particular needs of family attendees. Not everyone feels immediately confident about dealing with family groups or other people's children and training should make them feel better equipped and more confident. You could draw upon the experience of

staff who have families or invite staff to sit in on consultation sessions with family user groups – there is nothing as powerful as hearing it from the horse’s mouth!

The audit in this toolkit can be used to identify practical ways in which customer care can be improved.

As much as the children may love their outing, I have found that their parents can be among the most stressed members of an audience. Front-of-house staff are ideally placed to ensure their visit is a success. Spend time retraining staff if necessary, to pre-empt the typical needs of parents with young children. (Jamie Normington, Eastbourne Theatres)

### **Top tips for customer care**

- put yourself in their shoes to see your organisation through their eyes
- ensure all staff understand the organisation’s policy for families
- train staff and support them in their important frontline work
- create an induction pack for new staff
- good practice means anticipating needs as well as responding to them
- be sensitive to anxieties and have the ability to reassure families
- encourage staff to listen to family visitors and report feedback
- organisations that are family friendly listen to children as well as adults
- use feedback to improve your welcome or overcome problems

### **Consultation**

Most families share similar needs. The issues they care about come up time and again in research findings and this information has helped formulate the guiding principles in this toolkit. Some families may have additional requirements. The only way you will know for sure how well you can meet their needs is to consult them. There are a number of ways in which you can do this and the method you choose will depend on what is convenient for your families and what you want to find out.

# Consultation methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Survey by post	<p>You can survey those who attend and those who don't</p> <p>Families can respond at a time that suits them</p> <p>It enables you to collect feedback on a wide range of issues</p>	<p>Response rate may be low</p> <p>Response may not represent cross-section of families</p> <p>Results will be mainly statistical – does not allow in depth probing of attitudes</p>
Assisted survey (eg at venue)	<p>Opportunity to clarify questions</p> <p>Can be a public relations or customer care opportunity</p>	<p>Adults may not be able to give necessary time and attention</p>
Web based survey	<p>Makes sense if you already have a family friendly site</p> <p>Customer responds when convenient</p> <p>Allows finite survey on specific issues or ongoing feedback</p>	<p>Access limited to those with internet use</p> <p>Needs to be publicised so families know it is there</p> <p>Needs to be easy to use</p>
Comment cards	<p>Allows ongoing feedback</p> <p>Customer able to express issues important to them</p> <p>Can be open or pose specific questions</p>	<p>Customers may need prompting by staff to complete one</p> <p>May take some time to gather significant feedback</p>
Focus groups	<p>Great for gaining insight into attitudes and opinions</p>	<p>Recruitment difficult because parents and carers may find it difficult to attend</p>

<p>Telephone research</p>	<p>May be more convenient for families</p> <p>Benefits of direct contact</p>	<p>May need to call back at time to suit them</p> <p>Limited to around ten minutes</p>
<p>Observation and anecdotal evidence</p>	<p>Involve your staff in gathering feedback</p> <p>Enables contact between staff and families</p> <p>Evidence based on actual experiences</p>	<p>Useful for instant feedback, but unlikely to provide a complete picture</p> <p>Beware of acting on single instances of anecdotal evidence</p>
<p>Family forums, user groups, customer circles</p>	<p>Feedback on a regular basis (two to three times a year)</p> <p>Allows you to test out ideas before implementing</p> <p>Families feel involved in your organisation</p>	<p>May be difficult to recruit regular participants (it is likely to be those who already attend so remember that those who do not attend may have different views)</p>

Here are some suggestions for ways to consult families. Remember, most families are busy and perpetually short of time. You may have to make several attempts to gather the information you need. If families agree to help you, make good use of their time and the information they give you.

**Here's an example ...**

Five members of a family friendly initiative in the east of England brought together families for a workshop-style information gathering exercise. The findings resulted in a set of recommendations that guided their work as well as a recruitment specification which includes step-by-step guidelines for putting together a forum. You can read more about this in *The Family Factor* which is on the recommended reading list at the end of this toolkit.

**Consulting children**

Being family friendly is about considering the needs of all members of a family group and providing opportunities for them to enjoy the arts together. While adults often make the final decision about what to do, children often have a significant say. Their opinions and reactions count and listening to them can shed valuable new light on your commitment to families.

The United Nations Convention sends a clear message about this:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (Article 12.1, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Clearly, any consultation with children needs to be with the consent of the parents or guardians and within the law. If you are in any doubt, seek the advice of professional agencies and researchers.



# Suggestions for reading and sources of information

## 1 *Family Friendly Report, Arts About Manchester, 2001*

This is a report on a three-year collaboration with venues, marketers, curators and artists to develop an approach to encourage families to participate in the arts. The 24 page publication includes research findings and uses case studies to illustrate ideas for improving provision for families and to highlight the advantages of collaborative marketing and partnership working. The accompanying CD Rom incorporates a wealth of other information ranging from additional reports to examples of promotional material.

Available from:

Arts About Manchester  
Churchgate House  
56 Oxford Street  
Manchester M1 6EU  
Phone: 0161 238 4500  
Email: [inray@aam.org.uk](mailto:inray@aam.org.uk)

£12.50 including postage and packaging  
(cheque with order please).

**2 Rose, Catherine, *The Family Factor*, Arts Council England, East, 2002**

This is a practical guide for venues who wish to improve their family friendliness, based on a project to pilot research and practical ideas in East England. The 54 page report includes suggestions on how to begin being family friendly, hints on programming, physical facilities and communications, case studies from six performing and visual arts venues, some pointers on legal issues and funding sources and suggestions for further reading.

Available from:

Marston Book Services Ltd  
PO Box 269,  
Abingdon  
Oxon OX14 4YN  
Phone: 01235 465500  
Email: [direct.orders@marston.co.uk](mailto:direct.orders@marston.co.uk)  
Fax: 01235 465555

£10.00 including postage and packaging. Cheques should be made payable to Arts Council England or include your credit/debit card details on your postal order and when ordering by telephone. You can print an order form from Arts Council England's website:

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/information/publications.php>

### **3 *Family friendliness: Audit of recent research and recommendations for the development of family audiences in the arts, Arts Council England, 2002***

This 52 page New Audiences report is a comprehensive audit of recent research into audience development and marketing initiatives in relation to family audiences. A wide range of marketing agencies, funding bodies, local authorities, arts organisations and venues across England were consulted to bring together key issues in relation to family friendly work. The audit contains a literature review and detailed information with website links and models of good practice which should be of particular interest to arts organisations. The report is downloadable from the New Audiences website.

The Arts Council, as part of its New Audiences Programme, invested over £1 million in the following types of family initiatives and activities:

- family friendly training for venues and improving venue facilities for family audiences
- action research marketing projects to attract family audiences to arts activities and events
- promotional campaigns designed to raise awareness of the arts to families and to encourage attendance and participation

Further details are available at [www.newaudiences.org.uk](http://www.newaudiences.org.uk)

## A selection of websites to browse

### **[www.newaudiences.org.uk](http://www.newaudiences.org.uk)**

An Arts Council England site that includes news updates and features relating to family friendly work around the UK

### **[www.familyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.familyfriendly.org.uk)**

Contains news and events for families in Greater Manchester

### **[www.fun4families.org.uk](http://www.fun4families.org.uk)**

Contains London based news, listings and information – includes separate information for adults and children

### **[www.macrobert.org](http://www.macrobert.org)**

Site for the Macrobert Arts Centre in Stirling – artistic policy and building includes extensive programming and provision for young people

### **[www.letsgowiththechildren.co.uk](http://www.letsgowiththechildren.co.uk)**

Sells family friendly guide books for different areas of the country and there's also a service which designs specially made activity packs

### **[www.thefamilytravelfiles.com](http://www.thefamilytravelfiles.com)**

Upmarket American site with ideas and information for family holidays – with web links to English family attractions

### **[www.whattodowiththekids.co.uk](http://www.whattodowiththekids.co.uk)**

Ideas for child friendly days out with searchable database organised by date and county

### **[www.artsandkids.org.uk](http://www.artsandkids.org.uk)**

Prince of Wales Arts and Kids Foundation, set up by Arts and Business. 'Arts and Kids works with business to enable children to explore the arts.'

### **[www.nfpi.org.uk](http://www.nfpi.org.uk)**

The website for the National Family and Parenting Institute which campaigns to make Britain more family friendly

### **[www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)**

A source of statistical information, from census data and other surveys

# Contacts

## **Network**

Network is the professional association dedicated to collaborative audience development and marketing. The members are the national arts marketing agencies in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, whose vision is to achieve a revolution in people's desire for the arts, at the heart of which is access for all types of attenders and participants – and families are a very important element in this.

Angela Tillcock  
Network Administrator  
Unit 2  
Sbectrwm  
Bwlch Road  
Fairwater  
Cardiff  
CF5 3EF

Phone: 029 2056 1600  
Email: [angela.tillcock@btopenworld.com](mailto:angela.tillcock@btopenworld.com)



Arts Council England  
14 Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 3NQ  
[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)  
Email: [enquiries@artscouncil.org](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org)  
Phone: 0845 300 6200  
Textphone: 020 7973 6564  
Charity registration number 1036733

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