

Opening Doors to Learning

Activities outside the classroom are sources of many different kinds of learning experiences for young children. You can support children's learning by providing opportunities for them to participate in community activities that match their interests, by responding to them in ways that support their participation, and by helping them do new things.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Learning Opportunities in Community Activities

- Observe the children in your classroom to identify their interests. Identify the kinds of play they do most often, the things that capture their attention, their favorite things to do, and the things that make them most excited.
- Identify the community activities that could be available to children in your classroom. Consider trips to community locations like the fire house, police station, or post office, or community places like grocery stores or building supply stores.
- Think about outdoor locations like a park, duck pond, or nature trail. Don't forget community activities that entertain children, like story hours at libraries and bookstores, music and dancing at children's festivals, and special events at children's museums. Remember recreation activities like roller skating, playing ball at a ball field, or bowling. Other opportunities include trips to a farm, animal shelter, or petting zoo; visits to the elderly at an assisted living facility; or a simple walk around the block.
- Provide children opportunities to participate in community activities that best match their interests and provide them opportunities to have many different experiences. For children who are interested in doing apple experiments in the classroom, for example, a trip to an apple orchard might provide them opportunities to pick apples, climb a ladder, count and feel the weight of apples in each other's baskets, run through the orchard, ride in a wagon, talk about the colors of different kinds of apples, and taste apple juice.
- Pay attention and help children sustain their participation in community activities by responding positively to what you notice them doing. Join in their activity, acknowledge and comment on what they are doing, describe or praise their actions, take turns with them, and show them you are excited about their participation.
- Help children expand or elaborate on their behavior in the activity. Praise them for trying to do something new, reinforce slight behavioral elaborations, model new behavior, or ask open-ended questions that lead children to expand on what they are doing.



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A Quick Peek

The children in Marielle's classroom had been learning about farms for some time and were excited to make a field trip to Mr. Cole's farm. The children loved feeding and imitating the chickens pecking at their food. They were delighted to discover that there were six kittens scurrying about the yard. Mr. Cole brought out a couple of wagons and let Marielle lead the children across the field to see his donkey, Hugo. Children took turns pulling each other in the wagon as others picked flowers and spotted honeybees working the clover along the way. In *Follow the Leader*, they copied Marielle's silly walking and hopping across the field. When they reached the fence, the children exclaimed, "Look! There's Hugo!" As Hugo ate some hay, Jackson told Marielle and his friends, "He's eating. He has teeth!" Marielle commented, "Look at him chew! His teeth are big! How about yours, Jackson?" "Hugo's are big. Mine are little," said Jackson, giggling as he showed the others his teeth. While the children commented on Hugo's eyes, ears, height, and legs, Marielle helped them compare Hugo's characteristics with their own.

You'll know the practice is working if...

- Children are interested in and stay involved in the community activities
- Children get excited about participating in community activities
- Children exhibit new behaviors while engaged in community activities

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Environment 1, 3, 4, 6
 The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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