

GUIDE FOR Families

This guide provides information for planning a trip to a museum and creating stimulating art experiences at home. Visits to museums and cultural institutions foster positive interactions with others and with art. Explorations at home allow participants to engage with art in a familiar environment. It is ideal to relate your experiences at home with visits to museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions. An example that incorporates both runs throughout the guide.

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Art Outings

Visits to art museums and galleries can be rich and rewarding experiences. Viewing original works of art in quiet, contemplative spaces that allow for social interaction can be beneficial for everyone involved and provide an opportunity for self-reflection and self-expression. There are many ways to visit a museum or gallery, and you can involve a variety of people in your experience.

Independent Visits and Programs

Family visits to museums and galleries

A trip to a museum or a gallery in a pair or with family and/or friends can be both convenient and rewarding. Such visits can be extremely enriching and can provide a relaxing break for everyone involved. They are easy to plan and are adaptable to various personal schedules and needs. You might also consider establishing an informal group of families dealing with memory loss who would like to travel as a group. These are families that you might meet at care organizations, in support groups, or in a number of other circumstances.

In our example, a daughter (D.) and her father (F.) plan to go to the The Museum of Modern Art together. F. has always had a passing interest in art, but has a hard time “appreciating” contemporary art because, he says, “I don’t really understand much of what’s going on in the works.”

Museum programs

Local museums may offer programs for people with dementia. Learn more about them and how you can register. The museum’s education department will most likely be the best contact, and some may have an access division, which caters to individuals with various special needs and disabilities.

Support groups

Visiting museums or galleries with a support group is also an option. You might want to join a support group that schedules regular outings to cultural centers or reach out to your local Alzheimer’s Association chapter or to other organizations that offer support groups. Encourage support-group leaders to contact museum staff to set up a tour or to establish a more extensive partnership program.



Day trips with care organizations

If at any point the care recipient attends an adult day center or other care organization, a group from the center may be planning art programs either on- or off-site. Consider taking trips together with members of the facility. If possible, invite other caregivers and family members to either travel with you or meet you at the museum so that they too can engage in interactive discussions with their loved ones.

Logistical Considerations

Scheduling

Whether you are considering an existing program or coordinating your own trip, make sure you are fully aware of the museum's policies, hours of operation, and accessibility and other issues that might affect your trip. Familiarize yourself with the museum's scheduling procedures, along with policies regarding small or large groups. Calling ahead to see when the museum is the least crowded can help make the visit work more effectively. Afternoon outings allow you adequate time to prepare.

Spaces

Make sure you are aware of the particularities of the space you are visiting. Having a sense of the flow of people in the lobby and in the galleries will help you avoid overcrowded areas or otherwise unwelcoming spaces. You should also know the locations of restaurants, bathrooms, and other amenities. If beneficial, ask if wheelchairs are available for loan. Most museums have wheelchairs and will provide them upon request.

Costs

Many museums, galleries, or cultural centers provide discounted or free admission for older adults and/or free programs for individuals with dementia and their caregivers. Before planning the trip, inquire about issues related to costs for yourself or for a group. Some museums offer passes that allow a free follow-up visit when you participate in a program. If you are attending as part of a larger group, you might consider minimizing costs by sharing transportation expenses and exploring museum membership discounts.

“I sat down and critiqued one of the paintings that I saw. And that brought back things that I had studied, and that made me start thinking that I didn't lose everything that I was afraid I was losing.”

MoMA participant

D. and F. had previously attended a Meet Me at MoMA program and received passes that allowed them to come to MoMA for free with three other family members (up to five people). D.'s husband and his sister are also interested in attending and making the Museum visit a meaningful and enriching family experience. They decide to go to MoMA later in the afternoon, around 3:00 P.M. They commit to leaving at 5:00 P.M. at the latest, in order to prevent fatigue from setting in, and plan an early dinner to complete the outing. Luckily, D.'s sister-in-law has a car, so they decide to drive on a Wednesday afternoon and park in one of the parking lots that provide discounts to MoMA visitors.

Transportation and parking

For trips to museums or galleries, think ahead about how you will get to and from the site. Gather directions and maps, and locate wheelchair-accessible entrances and parking lots, if necessary, in order to ensure a stress-free traveling experience.

The Museum Experience

Enjoying the museum

Every effort should be made to make the museum experience as enjoyable as possible. Give yourself plenty of time to get there, and do not be in a rush. The goal is to experience and access art and also take in the benefits of the museum itself, as well as the social aspects of the outing. If you are participating in a program, take advantage of the fact that someone else is leading the group and use the time to relax, explore your own interest in the works discussed, and get a psychological and emotional lift. The experience will be more rewarding if you also feel that you are being personally nurtured.

Choosing the works

If you are not participating in a scheduled program and will be facilitating the experience yourself, be sure to provide a general framework that will focus all participants and give the trip purpose. When planning, think of your visit as a two-tiered experience. In the first tier, you should have a general idea of what you will be seeing, in terms of particular works or a particular exhibition. In the second tier, allow yourself to roam freely and look at and discuss whatever is most appealing. Make sure to take into consideration the interests and backgrounds of everyone in the group. Do not attempt to cover too much ground in one visit. Rather, focus on prolonged engagement with fewer works. Throughout take note of the works viewed so you can discuss them at home using reproductions or digital images.

“This opens a wonderful opportunity for people to connect and to get over the ‘fear’ or ‘discomfort’ of being with the elderly, especially those with dementia. This is a great gift, and an important one in an aging society.”

MoMA participant



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.
Street, Dresden. 1908

D. thinks that taking her father to look at more iconic and accessible works will prompt him to explore some of the Contemporary galleries. She plans to focus on particular works in the Painting and Sculpture galleries that she has researched in advance using the Museum's Web site. Afterward she plans for them to stroll through the Contemporary galleries, allowing their explorations to go into uncharted and unplanned directions and to make connections to the works they have just viewed. When they get to the Museum, they go directly to the Painting and Sculpture galleries on the fifth floor. They look at three works in depth, all of which depict cityscapes. One particular work is especially intriguing to them: *Street, Dresden* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. They appreciate both the subject matter of the work and the signature style with which Kirchner transforms this urban street scene.

Remember that fatigue can set in, so make sure you do not tire yourself out or become frustrated with the range and scope of things to see. In general, more than two hours in any museum setting is physically and mentally taxing. Consider taking breaks and exploring non-exhibition spaces, such as the café and garden, for relaxation. You could also consider going out for a snack or meal after the museum visit to allow time for reflection and relaxation.



Helen Levitt. *New York*. c. 1940

The family strolls through the third-floor galleries to explore some photography—a favorite of F.'s, who had dabbled in photography and always appreciated the extent to which black-and-white photography had infused artistic practices with new ideas and a new aesthetic. Without having planned it, they stumble upon some photographs by Helen Levitt depicting New York street scenes, which provide great fodder for conversation about the ways New York has changed and the beauty of the photographs themselves. In addition, a natural conversation unfolds around Kirchner's depiction of street scenes in comparison to Levitt's. (D. had bought a print of Kirchner's painting that they use for comparison.) After another twenty minutes in the Photography galleries, the group takes a break in the Sculpture Garden, then goes to the Contemporary galleries.

“The program provides a wonderful opportunity, not only for the family members with dementia to participate, but everyone's invited to participate in the discussion, and that makes it more fun than just watching your loved one blossom. The memories that I'll have of this experience are quite moving, and they're emblazoned in my temporal lobe.”
MoMA participant

Setting the tone

Throughout, use a positive attitude and enthusiasm to set the tone. Make sure to balance your aims with the particular mood and interests of everyone you are with. Do your best to adjust to distractions of all kinds. It is fine if the viewing plan changes or a work is not seen; there will be other opportunities. Finally, keep reflecting on the process by sharing your experiences and listening to each other's stories.

Throughout, the pace is relaxed and the tone of the exchanges is jovial. Everyone makes sure to take their time looking. They describe elements and delve into some personal interpretations and associations. D. photographs the works viewed when allowed as they go through the galleries.

Leading the experience

Take time in front of the works of art. Ideally, you should spend about ten minutes looking at and discussing each artwork, depending on the number of people in your group, and less if you visit as a pair. You might consider taking longer in front of images of particular interest, but move on if there is a lack of conversation. You might want to mix in some extended explorations with faster viewing of works to add variety. If you are going to a particular exhibition, use the museum's resources, such as wall texts, labels, and audio guides, to help facilitate your experience.



Tony Cragg. *Grey Moon*. 1985

D. and F. make some connections to other times they have come to the Museum and to other personal experiences. In the Contemporary galleries on the second floor, they discuss the ways current artists are thinking about cities and incorporating those ideas into the materials they use. They come across some bewildering work that gradually becomes accessible as they explore it more thoroughly by reading the wall texts and continuing the conversation among themselves. They feel satisfied about being able to make connections to the more representational work nearby in the same gallery. A work by Tony Cragg catches their attention and provokes an interesting exchange: the artist had chosen to not just represent a city street but to bring materials found in an urban setting into the gallery to create an arresting and beautiful assemblage.

Deciphering the works of art

The following steps are meant to enhance your exploration of works and help develop a stimulating conversation. Adjust and adapt them as you see fit, based on the people you are visiting with. The following is an outline of the material covered in detail in Foundations for Engagement with Art (page 111).

OBSERVE

Make sure to take enough time to observe all aspects of the work independently. Encourage each participant to take a visual inventory of the work without speaking.

DESCRIBE

Next simply describe the work. Ask questions that prompt description: What do you see in this painting? What are some words you would use to describe this person or place? A complete visual inventory will help you to see details you might have otherwise overlooked and will enrich the conversation that follows. Once you feel you have spent enough time describing, summarize what has been said.

INTERPRET

Having described the work in detail, begin to interpret the various components. Touch on subject matter, composition, technique, and social and historical contexts. Encourage breadth and variety of interpretation.

CONNECT

As you continue your explorations, connect the artwork to your lives and experiences. This will encourage new insights and interactions. Do not hesitate to share personal opinions. Learn from each other and enjoy each other's company.

SUMMARIZE

Toward the end of the exploration, bring together the various threads of conversation that have come up. Connect ideas and opinions, and consider the meaning and value of the day's experience.

After another forty minutes, everyone is ready to call it a day. D.'s sister-in-law validates her parking ticket and goes out to get the car while the rest of the group waits in the lobby. They go uptown to have dinner at one of F.'s favorite restaurants, where they discuss what has affected them that day using reproductions of the artworks as prompts.

“I think it’s very interesting how my father—and others there with dementia—project feelings. I suppose we all do this, but it gives them a chance to express feelings in ways that I’m not sure they can otherwise.”
MoMA participant

Beyond the Museum

You can extend the museum experience to other settings using the suggestions included in the following section, Art at Home. Consider the themes explored during your museum visit and plan a follow-up discussion or a follow-up art-making project for you and other family members to do. Make sure that the context of the conversations or the project is stimulating and relevant to everyone's interests. When at all possible, use reproductions of the works discussed to inspire the creative process. Gather reproductions of the works you concentrated on during your visit by either purchasing postcards or prints at the museum's store or by locating them online. Introduce the images in future gatherings to help remember the museum trip and to further your discussion.

Art at Home

Engaging with art at home can also be enriching and rewarding. Because this experience is between the caregiver and the person with dementia, there is plenty of leeway to adjust and adapt the parameters and the components set forth in this section. Since there is a deep intimacy between you and the person you will be sharing these experiences with, feel free to transform the guidelines to best serve the psychological, emotional, and intellectual needs of both of you.

The next day, since their Museum experience had been an enlightening and fun outing, and unexpected connections had been made about street and city scenes, D. and her father decide to block out some time in the afternoon to visit the MoMA Web site (www.moma.org) and access additional work by artists they had seen the day before, bring out some of F.'s photographs and other reproductions of artworks they have in the house, and record some of F.'s stories about the city. F. had always been an avid reader and writer but recently had become reluctant to write. However, he is keen on recording the tales he would have written a few years earlier, and D. is excited to make an audio collection of her father's stories. The afternoon proves a success.

“For me, the caregiver, it was a most enjoyable activity, while, at the same time, I was helping my husband. This doesn't happen too often.”

MoMA participant

Logistical Considerations

Participants

You can engage in art-looking and art-making activities at home. However, if you think that other family members or families going through similar experiences would benefit from social time together, you could hold art-viewing gatherings with multiple families at each other's homes. In that case, make sure to adapt the logistical elements to accommodate the number of people who will be present. For everyone to get better acquainted with techniques and strategies for facilitating art-looking and art-making activities, look into museum offerings, local art programs, and community resources.

Dates and times

Choose dates and times that are best for you. Work around other schedules or anticipated activities to avoid conflicts or overload. Your engagements should probably not last any longer than two hours, but if there is enough interest, factor in additional time for socialization or art-making.

Spaces

The optimal space is relatively intimate and quiet. Try to use warm and welcoming rooms that evoke positive associations. Make sure the space has sturdy tables, comfortable seating, and adequate lighting. Arrange the tables and chairs so that everyone can see each other to encourage conversation. If you plan to make art, be sure to have enough table space to work on.

Costs

There are minimal costs associated with these art experiences at home. You can use resources provided by MoMA, and you can use the Internet to download images from Web sites free of charge. Costs may be incurred for art-making supplies and reproductions of artworks.

Professional educator

The level of interest among family members or a group of families may be such that you think hiring a professional educator would be desirable. Ideally, this individual would be experienced in working with people with dementia, interested in art, and highly organized. He or she will



be responsible for planning the sessions, gathering supplies and other material, and leading the conversation. Educators can be identified through museums, arts organizations, and universities or art schools.

Resources

There are many resources for images to discuss with family members. First, consider what is already in your home: the art that you display in the house, decorative art objects, and family photographs. In addition, many art institutions have reproductions available for purchase in their stores in the form of posters, postcards, or prints. Museums Web sites often include reproductions of the works in their collections as well as information about the artists and the art movements they are associated with. You can download images from these Web sites to either print or view on a computer screen. If you are using a computer or a television, make sure the screen is big enough, the lighting appropriate, and the environment comfortable.

MoMA's online collection is an extensive resource, containing images and information about modern and contemporary artists. You can access the online collection at www.moma.org/collection. Additionally, Art Modules with accompanying art cards and a DVD of images are included with this publication.

The Viewing Experience

The more familiar you are with the images you will be discussing the better. Follow the steps outlined below to ensure that you are prepared to lead an engaging discussion. It is recommended that you turn to Foundations for Engagement with Art (page 111) to equip yourself with the tools necessary to develop and facilitate a comprehensive viewing experience.

Selecting a theme

Your theme should be appropriate and relevant for all participants and one that you feel comfortable discussing. You could focus on artworks that share a subject matter or medium, a single artist, an art movement, art from a specific geographical region, or art from a certain time period. You should take into account those styles, periods, mediums, or artists that you like or that intrigue you and everyone else involved. If you know that particular themes will resonate, it is worthwhile to pursue them. Consider Art of the Twentieth Century, Portraiture,



Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, Materials in Sculpture, Landscapes, Women in Art, or Photography and Narrative. If you would like to pursue a more general overview of the definitions and histories of art, a theme such as What is Art? might be appropriate.

Selecting the works of art

Choose four to six works that fit into your theme. Be amenable to integrating personal items, such as family photographs, that might generate conversation. You might even consider beginning your exploration by making connection to the art that is around you. For example, you could suggest how a chair in the home might be a work of art. Steer clear of works that you think might be in any way unsettling.

Determining the sequence

The sequence in which you view the works should connect them in the context of the theme you have chosen. The sequence may simply be chronological, or it may move from works that are more figurative to those that are more abstract, or from simpler works to those that are more complex in composition. Order the works in a way that you feel is clear and sensible.

Preparing questions and gathering information

Plan to ask questions that provoke a lively experience. Your questions should promote further inquiry and exploration. Using online resources, exhibition catalogues, museum wall labels, museum audio guides, and books, research the works and artists that you will be discussing. Plan to weave historical and other relevant information into your conversation. Again, this should be very natural and unforced. Beware of the tendency to want to share all the information that you have about the work of art.

Discussing the works

Ideally, you should spend about ten minutes discussing any one image or work, depending on the number of people present. However, feel free to move on from a work if there is very little interest, or to continue and explore that work longer if it leads to further connections. Be open to digressions and to linking conversation points to personal experiences. Make sure that you are empathetic to all comments and questions, and allow all voices to be heard.

“We have some caregivers who keep coming to the program even after their loved one has passed. They say the program gave them memories at the end that were positive. Living within the moment is what they definitely do while here but they also create memories the caregiver can hold on to.”

MoMA educator

Creative Projects

Both you and your loved one can engage in creative endeavors, either individually or in a collaborative effort. Individual interests should be addressed in these art-making experiences, and they can include such mediums as drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, storytelling, and writing and any others that appeal to all participants. There is a wide range of materials, techniques, and strategies that you can use when making art. This section provides a general outline for planning and implementing the program. The specifics of each art-making project will determine the details. For projects related to specific themes, see the Art Modules included with this publication.

Finally, that weekend D. takes out her camera and with her father takes photographs of their neighborhood. They truly collaborate in terms of choosing the subjects, talking about the angles and composition they want to use, and debating the merits of one shot over another. They make great use of their digital camera, and when they return home they upload the images to the computer.

Creating optimal conditions

Consider the goals and the process of your project; keep it simple and fun. The aim is to initiate self-expression and tap into artistic potential. While instructions should not be too complicated, make sure to avoid projects that could be deemed childish. Design projects that are conceptually intriguing but do not demand advanced skills in any particular area. Provide some structure while still leaving plenty of room for flexibility and individuality. If applicable, take into account the participants' physical limitations and reduced dexterity when choosing materials and processes.

D. makes sure to have all the necessary material and equipment ready and places the computer in a very accessible and cozy area, where F. feels comfortable. They have a good time juxtaposing Kirchner's and Levitt's images from the Museum's collection with their own street scenes and cityscapes.

Preparing background information

Sharing photos and reproductions of works of art from catalogues or books may inspire the creative process. Research the artists whose work you will be showing and share this

information. If you are regularly going out to museums, it is useful to consider the works you have seen and discussed while engaging in your own creative endeavors. This links the work you will be making to the scope of art history and can provide ideas for the project. Make sure you are showing works as inspiration only and not suggesting that participants should try to produce similar works.

Tailoring projects to participants' interests

Think of participants' previous experiences with art-making. For example, if one person was interested in wood and furniture making, think of the ways you could channel that into a more focused practice. Adjust interests creatively: for example, if someone was fond of writing stories or poems but does not feel physically capable of writing, propose that they tell their stories and record them.

Preparing instructions

Use step-by-step directions that are not too lengthy and are easy to follow. Write out the instructions to help you remember them, and explain them clearly at a moderate pace.

Supplying material

Provide an ample amount of materials. Make sure you have enough to create more than one work. Showing samples of finished artwork or works in progress will help give a better idea of what the process could lead to.

In addition, D. had taken digital photographs of the works they saw at the Museum and she displays slide shows on the computer regularly over the following weeks. The slide shows allow D. and F. to continue to connect their experiences at MoMA to their photography project.

Supporting participants

Get started with your project, offering assistance to participants at any level necessary. Repeat instructions as often as needed and offer positive reinforcement. Show patience with your words and your tone, and use humor and stories to set an informal mood. Offer praise and critique with sincerity. If participants conclude that what they are producing is simply

“What the program will do for me is give me some memories. It gives me something to hang on to, because it’s been difficult to watch the man that I love dearly not be the man that I love. So I have something to hang on to. He now doesn’t remember it, but I have it. And that’s extremely important.”

MoMA participant

“no good,” find ways of getting beyond this response with positive reinforcement to help the person to see the merits in what they made. Avoid simplistic evaluations: saying something is “good” or “bad” may not sufficiently connect to the participant’s needs. Instead, allow your conversation about the works to become descriptive and associative rather than evaluative. For example, a comment such as “I really like the way you applied the paint and created so much texture in this work” or remarks about particular techniques, gestures, or choices can create a dynamic and fruitful conversation.

The Museum experience and the extended activities at home provide D. and her father with quality time together and some extremely meaningful engagement. They both grew and learned while revisiting their interests, thinking about their own lives, and discussing the ways other artists engaged with their communities using different mediums.

Showing the work

Displaying the art in a social context reinforces the fact that what has been created is of value. The work becomes a spark for further conversation and promotes continued pride. Sharing the work also provides opportunities for further discussion on the part of all participants.



