

Family Learning Activity: Visit a Zoo!



The next time you visit your local zoo, turn it into an educational adventure by focusing on the habitats as well as the animals. This can help your child learn important principles about the needs of animals and the importance of habitat conservation for protecting them.

1. Before you visit, check out your local zoo's website with your child.

(Example: <http://nationalzoo.si.edu>). Choose one or several animals you'd especially like to see.

2. Find out where the animal is originally from, and what its environment (habitat) is like.

While reading about the animal, ask your children what they think the animal will need to thrive at the zoo.

3. Visit the zoo!

Find the animals you read about and enjoy time as a family watching them and talking about them.

4. Remind your child of some of the questions you talked about at home.

Are there major threats to its habitat? Is the animal threatened or endangered? What things does it need from its habitat? Text displays at the zoo may help you answer questions such as these.

5. Observe how the animal interacts with its zoo environment.

Does the animal like climbing trees, snoozing, swimming, or wallowing in mud? Help your children see that the animal interacts with its environment by climbing a tree or burrowing under ground.

6. Note the objects in the animal's zoo environment.

What kinds of natural and man-made objects are in the animal's zoo habitat? Are there enrichment objects such as climbing trees, balls, or ice blocks with treats inside that encourage natural behavior? Are there plants and trees? Ask children if they think they would find similar plants and trees in this animal's native habitat? Where does the animal sleep? What does it eat? Is there a water source in the habitat enclosure?

7. At home, wrap up your experience by encouraging your children to use creative expression to show how this animal needs its habitat. Invite them to draw the animal in its habitat, create a song, poem, dance, or other creative project that demonstrates how the animal needs its habitat to survive.



Green Tip

Help conserve habitats for animals by supporting the National Zoo's Kids' Adopt a Habitat program.

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Support/KidsAdopt/default.cfm>