

# Tips for Children-Friendly Interactions at Hillwood

April 2026

Hillwood introduced a new training, *Children-Friendly Interactions at Hillwood*, designed to help staff and volunteers feel more confident engaging with families and young visitors. Developed by the Interpretation department, the training was informed by staff and volunteer feedback gathered through a Fall 2025 survey.

The training emphasized the important role children play in the visitor experience, shared practical tips for creating a welcoming environment, and provided strategies for managing challenging situations.

We hope these tips support the vital work of our staff and volunteers in creating a welcoming space for all.

## Why are child and family visitors important to Hillwood and all museums?

Children are already an important part of Hillwood's audience and welcoming them supports the museum's mission to engage all visitors.

Studies show that a child who visits a museum is **3-4 times more likely** to return as an adult than children who do not visit museums.

Today's child visitors strengthen the future of museums by cultivating lifelong visitors, supporters, and advocates. Their presence signals community engagement, enhances inclusivity, and reinforces Hillwood's role as a relevant, accessible space. Additionally, the museum fosters meaningful intergenerational connections, creating shared experiences and traditions for families.

## Friendly Greetings Set the Tone

Start with a friendly hello! Greet and welcome children and their adults wherever you encounter them. A friendly hello lets them know we are pleased to see them and hope they have a great visit.

Visitors with children may especially want to know about: restrooms and changing stations, how to navigate with a stroller and/or baby carrier, where to eat, how to manage large bags, where to breastfeed and/or pump, how to follow Hillwood's "museum manners," and fun activities for kids. The more we understand what visitors with children need, the more empathy for them we have and the better we are able to respond supportively to them. Learn more on Hillwood's website: [Visit with Your Children](#).

Fun activities to point out for visitors with children include: the mansion and garden treasure hunts (4), family audio tour (8 and older), and enjoying a change of pace outdoors. If comfortable, you may also enjoy posing quick and easy conversational questions like, "Can you find \_\_\_?", "Who can be the first to spot the \_\_\_?", and "My favorite thing here is \_\_\_\_. What's yours?".

## What to Do When Intervention is Needed

There will be situations when intervention is needed – when there's a behavior that needs to be redirected in order to promote safety of the objects and safety or comfort of the visitors. When that happens, there are steps we can take and language we can use, to ask visitors to modify their behavior in a way that is polite, firm, and age appropriate.

When intervention is needed, here's a 4-step approach:

1. Approach children and their adults as partners. Stay calm and courteous.
2. Ask for the desired behavior without accusation.
3. Offer up the "why."
4. End on a positive note: "Thank you!"

## Sample Responses by Location Using the 4-step Approach

### Mansion:

- “Folks – a friendly reminder: the art here is fragile, so please keep hands to ourselves. Thanks for your help!”
- “Walking feet please, my friend. That keeps everyone safe. Thanks for being a helper!”
- “My friends, let’s keep a little space between our bodies and the columns. Thank you!”
- “Can you help keep an eye on your grownups? We know they sometimes get excited and forget not to touch!”
- “I see you want to know how that purple wall feels, but we need to keep hands to ourselves. Thanks for being a helper!”
- “I see you’re really excited to find the next item on the Treasure Hunt, but we’ve got some really delicate objects in here. Can you creep slowly like a sloth to help keep them safe?”

### Gardens:

- “I can see you like to climb, but those rocks are slippery. Let’s find a safe spot to explore instead.”
- “We need to keep rocks on the ground where we found them to keep the fountain clean and people safe. I appreciate your help!”
- “Let’s keep our feet out of the water so no one slips. Thanks for helping!”
- “Please come down from the statue. Did you know Leo is over 200 years old? We ask people not to touch to keep him safe. If you stand in front of the statue, I’ll be happy to take a photo for you.”
- “Let’s stay on the paths so the plants can keep growing. Thanks for being such a great garden helper!”

### Visitor Center:

- “I hear excited voices. You sound like you’re having fun! Let’s lower our voices so others can talk too. Thank you!”
- “Where’s your grownup? Let’s ask them to come help you out.”
- “Let’s keep our bodies calm indoors so no one gets hurt. Thanks!”
- “I love that you’re having fun, but let’s save the running for outdoor spaces. Thank you!”

## Use Inclusive Language

Inclusive language helps us be welcoming by avoiding making assumptions about family structure or gender. A good rule of thumb is to avoid commenting on appearance or resemblance. The chart below lists examples of words to avoid, and why, and (on the right) shares what words to use instead.

Avoid	Why?	Instead
- parents - mom, dad - grandparent	Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent or a familial relation. Grandparents, nannies, and others may not identify as parents. Not all children have a mom and dad.	- grownup - adult
- son - daughter - grandchild	The children in someone’s care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, godchildren, not a familial relation, etc. You may also not want to assume gender of a child.	- child, children - young person/people
- girls - boys	It’s always wise not to assign gender to individuals you do not know.	- friends - folks
- family resemblance	Many families may include stepparents, adoptive parents, or parents who conceived with donated eggs or sperm, and many multi-racial children resemble one parent more than the other. Don’t assume that a child who doesn’t look like their caregiver is adopted or not a familial relation.	- Keep it to yourself