

# Where are the Children in Event Management Research?

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to provide guidance to help plan, integrate and deliver events that meet the needs of children and teenagers. The review focuses on existing best practices and guidelines with a view to support children's and teenagers' well-being, to improve their experience, safeguard their needs and those of their carers (e.g. parents, guardians, friends, teachers).

As opposed to some hospitality sectors, where the 'adult-only' trend is growing (Séraphin et al, 2020), more and more events are targeting families with children. They form an important part of society and are potential returning visitors or ambassadors for the event as such, yet they are rarely considered in the development of visitor guidelines (Séraphin & Grande, 2024; Séraphin, 2022; Séraphin & Gowreesunkar, 2020).

Other scholars have also called for children's voices to be heard (Canosa et al., 2020; Koščak et al., 2021) as their views of the world of entertainment and experience are very different from those of adults – it is therefore important to understand their perspectives (Rakic & Chambers, 2012).

Studies show that it is vital to involve children's interests early in the event planning process, as this helps to develop their emotional and social needs (Dowse et al, 2007; Frey, 2019; Schlemmer et al, 2021; Viviers & Botha, 2019).

Ensuring a successful experience for children could be crucial to the longevity of the event, as they may become returning visitors and/or bring others along (Martin et al, 2018; Viviers & Botha, 2019). In addition, evidence shows that children's voices and needs play an important role in the decision-making process for family outings and leisure trips (Kim et al, 2010).

Studies show that events can have a positive impact on children’s well-being, for example, a local arts event transformed lives by improving educational attainment, increasing a sense of belonging and reducing crime rates (Alton, 1998; Borstlap & Saayman, 2019; Hixson, 2014; Ishaq, 2018). Pragmatically, event organisers could include dedicated procedures and spaces for children when developing a calendar of events (Tayler et al 2006; Sadeghi et al 2024). These procedures and places should consider children’s needs, their level of agency (Frey, 2029; Tayler et al, 2006), safeguard their physical and emotional needs (Brackenridge et al, 2015; Mecca, 2029; Sadeghi et al, 2024).

However, the current literature is fragmented and lacks a coherent account to effectively address the aforementioned recommendations. Therefore, this review aims to bring together the current guidelines to support those involved in planning, designing and delivering events to meet the needs of children and their carers.

## 2. Method

The method used for this paper is a systematic literature review, which provides information on ‘what has been written about a particular topic, covering what has been said, who has said it, and sets out prevailing theories and methodologies’ (Hammond & Wellington, 2013: 99).

The sources for the review were predominately academic publications in the fields of tourism, hospitality and event management but policy documents were considered as well. The journals were selected based on the Academic Journal Guide by the Chartered Association of Business Schools and the policy documents were selected based on their relevance to children’s safeguarding guidance. Leading databases (EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, Web of Science and Google Scholar) were used to identify relevant academic studies and Google Search was used to identify the policy documents. The search was facilitated by operators and the following keywords were used: ‘Child’, ‘Children’, ‘Kids’, ‘Safeguarding’, ‘Safe’, ‘Festival’ and ‘Event’ for the purpose of this study. Sources such as dissertations or publications in languages other than English and French or those with a restricted access were not considered. Figure 1 shows a diagram of the steps taken for the literature review.

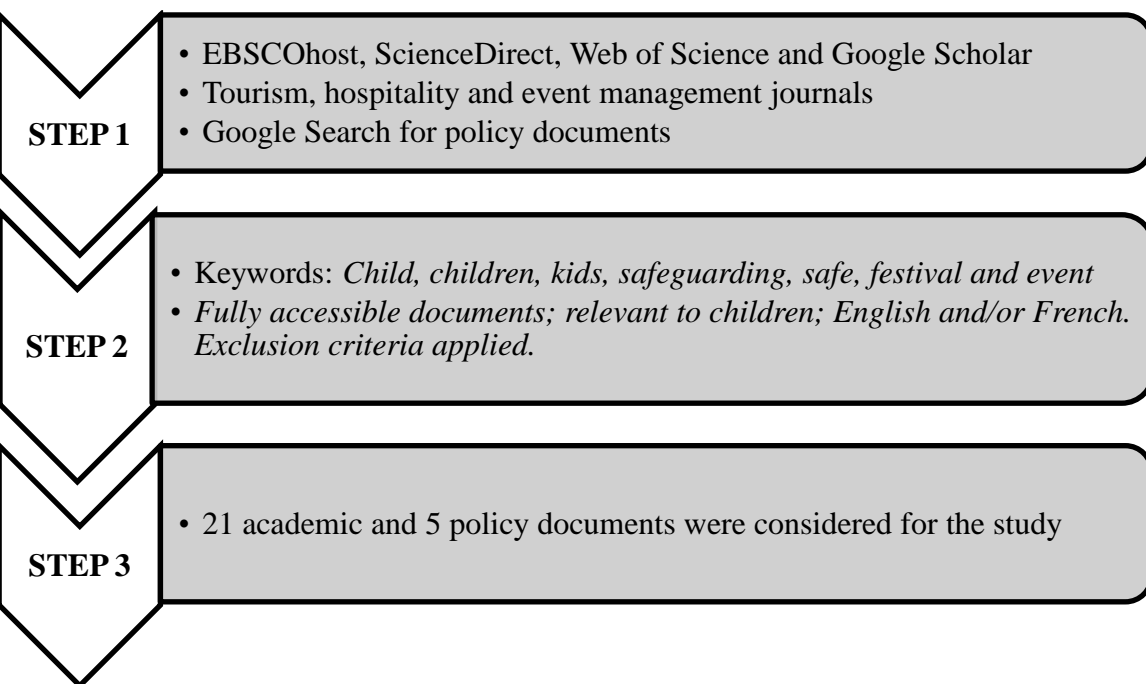


Figure 1: Process of identifying relevant sources

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Overview

Between 1998 and 2024, only 21 academic publications and 5 policy documents have been identified matching our criteria. Most academic research (61%) related to children and event management were published in 2010s. The research in the field is mainly empirical (71%) and published in academic journals (90.5%). Europe is the part of the world where most research has been conducted (28%) (See Table 1). The children’s safeguarding guidelines retrieved from the five policy documents are all published in the UK and those from the Department of Education (2023, 2024) are the most recent. As ‘the Purple Guide has been written by UK event professionals primarily for the UK’ (Purple Guide [Online]), the Western-centred focus of the academic sources (Europe, Americas & Australia/Oceania = 63%) is relevant and contributes to the validity and reliability of the results for the UK market.

Table 1: Overview of the Academic Literature

<b>Year of Publication</b>		<b>Geographical focus</b>	
1998	4.7%	Asia	21%
2000s	9%	Africa	7%
2010s	61%	Europe	28%
2020s	19%	Americas	21%
		Australia/Oceania	14%
		Middle East	7%
<b>Type of Publication</b>		<b>Type of Research</b>	
Journal articles	90.5%	Conceptual	33.8%
Book chapter	4.7%	Empirical	71%
Conference paper	4.7%		

Getz (2007) identified a variety of types of events, which includes cultural celebrations; festivals; carnivals; heritage commemoration; sport events; fairs; business and trade events; etc Arts and entertainment related type of events are the most popular in research on children and events (Table 2).

Table 2: Typology of Events in Academic Literature

Arts & Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gyor Kids Festival</li> <li>▪ Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood</li> <li>▪ Afrikaans Arts Festivals</li> <li>▪ The WeeFestival</li> <li>▪ Aardklop National Arts Festival</li> <li>▪ Adelaide Fringe Festival</li> <li>▪ The International Children’s Games</li> <li>▪ Street Child United event</li> <li>▪ Music event/competition (not specified)</li> </ul>
Cultural Celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Halloween</li> <li>▪ Canadian Children's Culture</li> <li>▪ Rio Music Festival</li> <li>▪ Chinese New Year</li> </ul>
Sport & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Olympics, Triathlon, others (not specified)</li> </ul>

Most research considered for this study are based on art and entertainment related type of events. Followed by cultural celebrations. Sports and recreation events are marginally represented in the study.

### 3.2. Identification of key needs of children to be considered for the design of events

The summary of the reviewed literature identifies the following core areas that make a positive contribution to an event experience for children. These are these key areas that provide the starting point or foundations for the guidelines within the Purple Guide to create and design children friendly events.

#### Core area 1: Self-expression and Empowerment

The organisers of events need to enable children to express themselves and be who they want to be. Children need to be empowered so that they feel as important or more important than adults. Studies show that asking children to present their work, demonstrate their skills or talents during an event helps to empower them (eg Borstlap & Saayman, 2019; Clark, 2008; Karasilnikov, 2020; Tayler et al, 2006).

#### Core area 2: Health and Safety

The safety of all children is an important criterion to consider (Brackenridge et al., 2015). Various government agencies (Department for Education, 2023, 2024), charities (Child Protection in Sport Unit, National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, 2017, 2019) and local organisations (Cambridgeshire LSCB, 2013) in the UK provide guidelines and self-assessment tools for children’s safeguarding. Below is a summary of recommendations for those who are considering bringing their child to an event based on the policy documents:

1. Age appropriateness: Choose events suitable for your child’s age.
2. Safety first: Know the emergency exits and protocols.
3. Ear protection: For loud events, bring ear protection.
4. Stay close: Keep an eye on your child. Safety in numbers

5. Essentials: Bring snacks, water, and a first-aid kit.
6. Downtime: Plan breaks for rest and relaxation.
7. Behaviour expectations: Explain what acceptable behaviour is and what is not.

#### Core area 3: Rules

Co-creating and providing clarity regarding expectations, boundaries and rules is key to successful event participation with children. For example, agreeing to stay up later than usual (Mecca, 2019) helps manage their expectations and this plays an important role in the sense of freedom children need when attending events (Clark, 2008; Muller, 2020).

#### Core area 4: Fun

Recent work has added to these areas, for example several studies have found that having “fun” and “family bonding” are important factors for children when attending events to develop and share collective memories (see Jepson et al., 2019; Muller, 2020; Sadeghi et al., 2024).

#### Core area 5: Family and Societal Cohesion

Children’s participation in events have also been found to be instrumental in improving the wellbeing of all family members and their overall quality of life (Jepson et al, 2019). Studies have also shown that children’s participation in events have other societal benefits as their presence helps bridge the gap between members of the local community (Mecca, 2019), across generations or social boundaries within and outside the family circle (Muller, 2020). The studies also found that such exposures helped to develop the children’s prosocial behaviour, convey messages and raise awareness of issues that directly affect them; convey positive values; and contribute to positive memories and happiness. Some studies found that children’s participation in events was particularly helpful in developing a positive experience and their happiness among those from underserved communities (Frey, 2019) or those who had experienced some kind of trauma (Ng et al, 2022). Their participation was beneficial as it helped them to understand their views and experiences of their environment by making their voices heard (Frey, 2019; Ng et al, 2022; Tayler et al, 2006)

#### Core area 6: Edutainment (Education and Entertainment)

Various studies have shown that children’s participation in events contributes to their learning, for example through exposure to arts, culture, and music (Krasilnikov, 2020; Sadeghi et al., 2024; Tayler et al., 2006; Zhou et al. 2018).

#### Core area 7: Equipment and Facilities

Frey (2019) notes that their experiences are particularly influenced by family-friendly facilities on site, such as breastfeeding areas, quiet spaces to retreat, spaces or washrooms accessible to families

with children. It is also important to bear in mind that children are not a homogenous group (Hixson, 2014; Martin et al, 2018), therefore dedicated resources to inform the families in advance will help to manage the expectations and experiences of the children in their care.

Core area 8: Consider the entire event journey (*before, during, after*)

Research shows that it is important to consider all the five stages of the event experience – anticipation/preparation, travel to the event, on-site experience, return travel home and recollection of the experience (Kim et al., 2010). Furthermore, these five stages of children’s lived experience of events are also shaped by how their parents, guardians or carers experience the event (see Dowse et al., 2017; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011).

Figure 2: Guidelines for organisers of events to meet the needs of children

- Facilitate self-expression
- Empower children and co-create experiences
- Set clear age-appropriate rules and expectations
- Create a fun environment and convey positive values
- Bridge generational and social divides
- Provide an environment for learning and self-development
- Put health and safeguarding procedures in place
- Involve the target group in the planning and design of the event
- Consider the five stages of the experience (anticipation/preparation; travel to the event; the on-site experience; the return travel home; the recollection of experience)
- Allow for engagement and showcase children’s skills or talents
- Contribute to the development and sharing of collective memories
- Facilitate for family and community bonding
- Provide for dedicated family-friendly facilities and equipment on site

#### 4. Conclusion

While the study identified a useful set of guidelines for event organisers to best meet the needs of children and their families, it was also found that there is scope for further research in this area. Informed decision making by all stakeholders should be based on empirical evidence and we call on the academic community to develop studies that further support this important area of research. The contribution of this study is twofold - by identifying the relevant studies, it provides a solid basis for further research, and the study has synthesised a pragmatic list of guidelines for event organisers to meet the needs of children. Having said that, the literature used for this study covers an age range between 3 and 19 (Ercsey, 2018; Hixson, 2014; Mecca, 2019; Schlemmer et al, 2021). This age range of children does not represent a homogeneous group (Poria & Timothy, 2014). It is therefore important for research in event management to come up with a segmentation of the children and youth by age and needs, to be able to fully meet their needs. Stage 2 of the research, namely the focus group, is going to address these limitations.

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