



Afternoon Tea and Kids: A Good Mix?

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These days, afternoon tea at a hotel — or a tearoom — is more fun than fussy. Sometimes there's even a theme like the [Science Afternoon Tea at London's Ampersand Hotel](#).

Tea can be a terrific occasion to practice “grown-up” manners but children should have enough experiencing dining out to make it through tea service without a meltdown — perhaps age 7 or older (ages 4-5, is likely the minimum for things to go well). Believe us: It will be more enjoyable for all if your kids are excited about the event.

Not sure if your kids can handle an hour or so at a table with china, fancy food and attentive service? That's the point, says Cindy Grosso, founder of the Charleston School of Protocol & Etiquette, Inc., which teaches manners to people of all ages. She thinks kids can rise to the occasion. “The secret to a successful tea experience is to let kids know what is expected of them before you arrive,” says Grosso. “Let them know the expectation and they can hit the mark,” she says. “They get in trouble when they don't know what the limits are,” she adds.

Remember that afternoon tea doesn't have to be a drawn-out affair. If you want to give it a try, select the short menu with fewer courses (skip the finger sandwiches and maybe just order the scones followed by pastries). Then, call it a day.

While some tea rooms discourage — or even don't allow young children — others welcome them. Some Park Hyatt hotels offer tea but always check ahead, as hours at all hotels vary. “We take time to explain tea service to our young guests, who may be experiencing this special moment for the first time,” says Matthew Garelick, executive chef at the Park Hyatt New York.



Prep Your Kids for Tea

- Explain that they'll sit for about an hour at a fancy table with fancy food. Talk about how tea works: You get to choose a tea (widely recommended for kids: non-caffeinated herbal teas with a drop of honey) and that it will be poured from a breakable teapot into a fragile china teacup.
- Define "polite:" saying please and thank you; not using electronic devices; offering to serve others at the table before yourself and being extra careful with hot tea.
- Suggest that tea is a great chance to pay attention to your surroundings. Grosso suggests a visual treasure hunt approach that can help younger children channel their energy toward the end of the tea. "Give them some things to look for and tell them that afterward you'll want to hear about the one thing they liked best," Grosso says.
- When you make the reservation, ask if children under age 12 are welcome. Lady Mendl's, the famed New York tearoom at the Inn at Irving Place, discourages children under 12. However, the [Balmoral in Edinburgh has an afternoon tea tailored just for children](#) (and some of Harry Potter was actually written in that hotel!).
- Holiday teas book early, so plan accordingly. The "Teddy Bear Tea" at the Park Hyatt Aviara in Carlsbad, California, includes an appearance by a Peppermint Princess.
- Expect a multi-sensory experience. Hotel tea service nearly always includes choices of tea varietals and much of the experience is shaped by the presentation of fancy food. Many hotels set the stage with live piano or harp performances.

