

Is Your Family Ready for Broadway?

Professional theatre is a lifestyle, not just a job. It is a long term, serious commitment. Is your family prepared for this commitment, or are there things you need to shore up before pursuing a Broadway lifestyle?

We hope this quiz will give you some food for thought:

1. Do you have a job of your own that is extremely flexible, do you work from home, or do you have a spouse that can “hold down the fort” financially for a year or more?

Working mothers are rare in theatre. If have a very flexible job such as online work, a writer, etc it could be possible. But the demands of the theatre work schedule just aren't conducive to mom having a job. Single parents find this almost impossible, unless they have enlisted the help of some other significant other (and aunt, grandparent, etc).

2. Do you have children that need your attention?

Tours require that you leave other siblings (no, you cannot bring them). Even if you aren't leaving on tour, families are very much disrupted for the sake of a performing child. Everyone else has to tolerate this and that breeds resentment and jealousy since siblings and other parents aren't as involved. The NY Times reported that Broadway mom Melissa Borger as saying that she “still mourns missing much of the year that her daughter Alexi spent in kindergarten while her son Christopher toured in “The Lion King” (he went on to star in Finian's Rainbow). Can you afford to miss your other child's milestones in life?

3. Do you have the support of your spouse and the rest of your family?

Broadway, like all showbiz can be extremely hard on a marriage. Families are very much disrupted for a performing child and the focus ends up on the child out of necessity. This drives a stake between a couple if you aren't careful. Make sure both spouses are truly supportive and willing to be involved in the child's career. In a very practical sense, consider things like...does your spouse expect you to be home for dinner?

4. Do you have the financial reserves to support this career?

Voice lessons, dance lessons and acting lessons are extremely expensive. Living anywhere in NYC is extremely expensive. Travel to auditions is expensive. Unexpected things like labor disputes can force a family to live in the city with no income quite suddenly. A show can close suddenly for a bad review and you may have leased an apartment with an unbreakable lease. It is true that young performers can make a nice living if they are cast in an Equity show, but after agent and manager commissions, 15% to the Coogan account, and heavy taxes there is simply not enough left to support a family in NYC. And it is next to impossible for Broadway moms to maintain a career of their own. Be realistic. Make sure you can afford this. Make sure you have thousands of dollars in reserve for emergencies.

5. Are you comfortable with leaving your child at the theatre with a “wrangler” who is hired by production?

Your child needs to be well behaved and professional without you. And you have to be the personality where you can leave your child, go to Starbucks for hours and return without driving yourself crazy with worry? For many who have done TV and film, this aspect of theatre is a deal breaker, so please carefully consider whether you feel safe leaving your child in this situation.

6. Are you (and your child) night owls by nature?

You will be driving to theatre at night, and picking your child up after midnight, often with a long drive home. Living in the theatre district just isn't realistic for most families, which means driving to a less expensive locale every day.

7. Are you able to make a solid commitment for at least 6 months?

For many families, this just isn't do-able. Things like family illnesses, parent work schedules, the sports activities of other children just make a 6 month commitment impossible.

8. Does your child have the type of personality that can handle rejection and jump back up to try again?

Rejection is FAR more obvious in theatre than it is in television or film work. In theatre, the rejection is right in your face, and it is very often for things that are out of your child's control. They send you home from the audition, they fire you for getting too tall ("oh look how big you are getting" is a crushing statement to a Broadway kid), shows close suddenly etc. As Julie Stevens says, "There should be many conversations with a child about what it is going to feel like when they no longer have to come to the theatre every day or see the theatre family every day. There should be plans made for when the time comes to leave the show so that the child has something to look forward to and doesn't feel like a failure for not being part of something special. A great idea is to set new goals for the future while you still have a job.

9. Is your child able to leave their current friends and return without a hitch? How important is their social life to them?

This can definitely be handled with a bit of effort—text messaging, planned outing with old friends, etc. But you still need to understand that they will have to turn down slumber parties, trips to amusement parks and other "landmarks" of childhood because they are scheduled to work. If you don't nurture their relationships while they are in a show, it becomes very difficult to transition back when the show is over. If a child's friends are their lifeline, think twice about embarking on a Broadway career.

10. Are you time conscious?

You can NEVER be late. That's all. Never.

11. If you are considering a tour: Are you OK with giving up your privacy completely?

Families on shows share everything, including illnesses, personal dramas, etc. Adults talk about adult subjects with no regard for children, dress and undress in front of them, etc. Kids fight like siblings, instead of co-workers. On tour, there is no going home to cool off. This can be extremely frustrating to a person who values privacy.

12. Does your child REALLY want this?

Of course they want to be "famous". But do they WANT this work. Not just a "yeah, that sounds fun", but a begging, pleading, WANT. As a parent, the rigors of this lifestyle will wear on you. You need to be sure that this is really fulfilling a dream for your child...that is what will keep you going when all of the above issues get tough.