

Crazy Kids Chicago

What will I do with my kids today?



Family Grounds Cafe

Rejoice parents! We have a great new place to relax while our children play. **Family Grounds Cafe** is part coffee shop, part play space. It offers families a clean, bright, contemporary, reasonably-priced play option on the North Side. They even have a lot with free parking. Family Grounds is owned by local parents John and Brady TenBrink. They saw the need for this kind of family space as they were raising their young family and decided to make it a reality. Open since mid-August, they are planning on adding classes, story times, and live music. Check in to their website www.familygroundscafe.com to see any new additions to their schedule. Family Grounds is located at 3652 North Lincoln Avenue, just north of the Brown Line's Addison stop. You can drop in just for coffee and a snack, or if you have a bit more time you can take the kids into the adjoining play space and stay a while. Admission to the play space is \$7.95 for the first child and siblings are \$3.95 each. Non-crawling infants are admitted free with a \$4.00 purchase.

I was really impressed with Family Grounds. It is one of the few places I've been that I could really relax while my child played. This is partly due to its manageable size and the placement of tables and chairs along the entire length of the play space. They have several pretend play areas: a kitchen, grocery store, and school house. There is a train table with wooden trains, reading area, play mat, art table, cars and trucks, and separate baby zone. Yet, the most important element is the staff. The "Nanny" of Family Grounds is Vicky (or Queen Victoria as she joked to me). As child activity leader she greets all the children and gives them name tags. The entire time your child is there she calls them by name, plays with them, gently enforces some rules, and meditates any squabbles between the kids. She even notified my friend when her son needed a fresh diaper. Honestly, I did not worry about my kid the entire time. I kept my eye on him, but knew that Vicky had control of the situation. If she didn't like the way he was playing she would have handled it. I saw her do it with several children in different situations during our visit. There are additional staff members assisting as well. They made sure the place remained spotless, actively cleaning the toys, furniture and mats. They also spent time playing with the children. Whew, what a relief. I actually had an uninterrupted conversation with my girlfriends - very nice.

Our group had lunch during our playtime. I was pleasantly surprised by the very reasonable prices for all the children's food. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich costs \$1.50. You can get string cheese and apple sauce for less than \$1.00 a piece. Options for adults include sandwiches and salads brought in daily from Southport Grocery. Of course there is a full coffee bar, teas, and pastries. It's so nice to bring the food into the play area. The kids can take a mini-break to eat then go right back to play. Mom can then enjoy her food in peace. I saw several parents taking advantage of the free WIFI, working on laptops while their little ones played.

Mom Says: If you have young children you will want to check out Family Grounds Cafe. It is a comfy, safe, easy place to enjoy with your kids. It's the perfect venue for a play date or for those times when you just need to get out of the house and be with other adults.

Donna

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"What will I do with my Kids today?" is on the lips of every parent, every day. Once you get past breakfast, the grueling