

50 Ways to Entertain Kids

by Susan Snyder-Davis

Whether you entertain kids on a daily basis, for special promotions, or on the spur of the moment, it's good to have an arsenal of entertaining ideas. Entertaining kids can mean paying attention to small details ... or doing big dynamic things. One skating center in Australia serves bread with butter and candy sprinkles, called "Fairy Bread," and it's a big hit with little kids. Other facilities sell pickles to kids and many have success selling "pickle sicles," popsicles made from pickle juice.

For bigger events, note the Discovery World in Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which promotes a Super Science Sleep-In. Each Sleep-In includes access to the hands-on facility, and an IMAX movie, a Little Caesar's pizza, a late night snack, and a continental breakfast. Parents drop off their kids between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. and pick them up between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. The fee per child is \$20 (museum members receive a discount). Sleep-In themes include "Be a Super Sleuth" and "Halloween Spook-Tacular." A museum brochure promoting Sleep-In nights is distributed to everyone who visits the facility. Why not establish your own Sleep-In events?

Resource Library

You may want to start a library of books on entertaining kids. One good book is John Kremer's *Celebrate Today!* — a terrific book for brainstorming fun ideas for events and ways to entertain children. Want to know when it's Winnie the Pooh Day, Bugs Bunny's birthday, Backwards Day, National Puzzle Day? You can have lots of fun celebrating special and fun events at your facility. Contact author John Kremer at 515-472-6130 or e-mail: johnkremer@aol.com.

A must-have book for anyone who entertains children is the *Outrageously BIG Activity, Play and Project Book* published by Hermes House (ISBN 1-84038-123-X). It's a staple of many day care professionals. Books for your collection should include the following topics: face painting, balloon animals, magic tricks, clowning/juggling, crafts for kids, games for kids, sing-along songs, and scavenger hunts, just to name a few.

Event Planning for Kids

A great way to draw attention to your facility is by hosting events for kids. Consider the following events:

1. Kids' Fair with booths from local kids' businesses for parents and kids
2. Carnival with activities such as face painting and games
3. Safety Fair featuring local fire and police officials and demonstrations
4. Talent pageant highlighting local talent
5. Kids Koncert featuring young musicians (work with local school music departments)
6. Kids Art Fair displaying young artists creations (work with local art teachers)
7. Kids Craft Fair with tables of different crafts
8. Olympics for kids

9. Toy Swap where kids bring their toys and exchange them for other toys
10. Comic Book Exposition - invite local comic book stores to set up displays
11. Sci-Fi Show - work with book stores or comic book stores to set up a show featuring science fiction merchandise
12. Mascot autograph Party - bring in costumed characters from local schools, colleges, businesses, professional teams and non-profit organizations
13. Scavenger Hunt
14. Pet Show or Contest
15. Costume Party
16. Haunted House
17. Easter Egg Hunt or candy scramble - spread candy throughout a large area and let kids scramble for it
18. Magic Event (work with local magic shops to set up booths and invite magicians to demonstrate their skills)
19. Egg Decorating Party - set up all the things kids need to decorate eggs (work with a local craft store)
20. Tree Trimming Party
21. Cookie Decorating Party - kids decorate cookies (ask local supermarket to sponsor party)
22. Science Fair (work with local school science department)
23. Dance Contest - feature different forms of dance: square dancing, ballroom dancing, ballet, tap, etc.
24. Lessons: crafts, juggling, magic, origami, kids cooking
25. Radio Control Exhibitions - demonstrations of radio controlled planes, cars, etc.
26. Tournaments for miniature golf, laser tag, video games, Skee-Ball
27. Story Telling Time - bring in story tellers (work with local book stores or local library)
28. Ethnic Fairs - feature food, costumes and displays from different nationalities: Mexican, German, Chinese, Indian, etc.
29. Historical Fairs - food, costumes, displays from different eras: medieval, colonial, Egyptian, Celtic, pioneer, etc. Celebrate an era such as the 50s, 60s, 70s, and even the 80s
30. Pumpkin Carving Contest
31. Fireworks Display
32. Santa's Workshop - visits from Santa and his elves with photos
33. Form a Kids Club with membership card, coupons, newsletter and special activities
34. Puppet Show

35. Aerobics for kids
36. Toy Fair - invite local toy store, specialty toy shops and antique stores with toys to have a booth at your Toy Fair. Best time to do this is before Christmas
37. Work with a network affiliate, cable television representative, or local costume shop to rent popular, current character costumes from TV and screen and hold an autograph party for kids
 - Have a Beanie Baby Swap Party, Barbie Party or Hot Wheels Party
39. Make up posters, activity books or bumper stickers with your mascot character and have the character on hand to sign autographs
40. Ask local church choirs to sing carols at your facility during Christmas
41. Rent special inflatables to create new attractions
42. Hold a band contest
43. Have a beauty pageant
44. Work with local department stores or clothing stores to hold a fashion show for kids and baby clothes for new parents
45. Showcase local theater actors excerpting performances from current plays
46. Karaoke Exhibition
47. Have the ultimate holiday decorations inside and out to draw bigger crowds during the season
48. Work with local supermarkets, bookstores and toy stores to highlight the newest kid products. If your local supermarket knows of a new candy or food item to be released for kids, find out if you can hand out samples and distribute related merchandise such as T-shirts. If the supermarket can't work with you, find out if they have the product manufacturer's contact information. Likewise promote current children's books, videos, CDs, toys, etc. at your facility and promote to the local media
49. Select a group of kids every year to be on your Kids Consulting Group or your Kids VIP Board. Make it a big media event.
50. Hold a contest for your kid customers to win a spot in your facility's TV commercial.

These are a few ideas for creating fun events to entertain children and draw attention for your facility. Bring in marketing partners to share promotions and costs and to reach a broader market. For example, for a crafts fair, talk with a local crafts shop about providing the supplies and people to demonstrate crafts. In exchange, the local crafts shop will benefit from showcasing their supplies to potential customers.

If you have an egg decorating or Christmas cookie decorating party, exchange supplies from your local supermarket for promotion and media coverage for them. Promote them as the event sponsors. You'll be surprised how much outside support you'll receive for events that involve children. If your event goes well, you and your sponsor may want to make it an annual event.

If you tie your events to a good cause and a local non-profit organization, you'll receive greater media coverage, more free publicity, and you'll gain access to the non-profit's media list, not to mention the support of another organization. To do this you'll need to contact the non-profit organization prior to the event for planning meetings, and be prepared to offer a percentage of the

event's proceeds to benefit the non-profit's cause. Seek out kids' causes such as Children's Wish List, Ronald McDonald's House, or groups such as Prevent Blindness America or the American Lung Association that have kid-specific causes.

To add excitement, be on the look-out for people who have unique skills. Hold regular exhibitions during busy times each week. If Saturday afternoons are busy, schedule an entertainer to perform while people wait to access your attractions, or schedule these activities during your slow times to attract more customers. Schedule entertainers throughout the year and create a hand-out brochure or activity calendar to let people know when to expect specific performers.

** Susan Snyder-Davis is the author of Marketing Your Family Entertainment Center. The above article is excerpted from the book.*