

Tips To Plan Great Family Programs

When you invite attendees to bring along the family, they often turn it into a family vacation. Some people plan their vacation every year around Mom or Dad's conference.

Including events for children and the family can increase attendance, give families a meaningful time together, introduce the children to their parents' business, solve child-care concerns (which may prevent single parents from attending) and give the kids a deeper understanding and positive spin on Mom or Dad's occupation.

To provide fun and interesting activities for the spouse and children results in happy families, which in turn results in happy conference attendees.

Events Just for Children

1. Research what kids love these days. Ask your friends, co-workers, teachers, or neighbors what their children love to do. Email everyone to ask what kind of party activities have been successful. Visit toy stores and places that host children's parties and ask what delights children. Coloring books and movies they've already seen simply won't do. If the kids get bored, they won't want to go back – which means the parents will have a problem on their hands.
2. If you plan to use give-aways such as key chains or small puzzles, ask several kids ahead of time to evaluate them. They will either LOVE them or HATE them.
3. Start with some great ice-breakers. Helping them meet each other will add to the success of programs. Don't have them find someone else who plays the same sport or musical instrument. This will start the session with some kids feeling like losers. Plan an activity that forces them to meet each other right away, such as have them find a person in the room with the birthday closest to their own. Or teach them basic networking by having them go up to one another, shake hands, say "Hello, my name is....." and then tell one thing they hate or find annoying or would avoid at all costs. Or get them laughing with a silly activity. Working in a group toward a goal (decorating the room, planning a party or ceremony at the end of the day) helps break the ice.
4. If the meeting is more than one day long, consider a volunteer project. Kids and teens really do love to help people. Decorating small candy cups (for the season or upcoming holiday), delivering them to a soup kitchen and then helping to serve can become an experience they will never forget. You MUST coordinate this with the program you will work with. It is always more meaningful when your children actually interact with people (elderly in a nursing home, children at a homeless shelter, bringing a thank you to police or firemen when they can actually hand over the thank you to them).
5. Know who is allowed to pick up the kids. Use an ID system to check them in and out.
6. Know the emergency plan of your venue and be certain all your staff knows what to do in case of emergency.

7. Ask the speakers at the conference if they have ideas. Often they have seen youth programs at other conferences, and they might contribute some ideas. One speaker, Rita Emmett, offered to present a lively, fun, interactive program on Self-Esteem to the teenagers and they loved it.
8. Always use trained staff. If parents volunteer, let them be helpers supervised by a qualified person. Sad to say, but it really is necessary to run background checks on everyone working with the kids' program.
9. If you plan the event and hire a staff, you are liable if something happens. Make certain you are covered for liability.

Events for Spouses

1. Remember, not all spouses are women. Shopping trips might be welcome, but if that's all you've planned, it won't cut it.
2. Consider inviting the spouses to some of the conference sessions, especially if you have a "change of pace" speaker, who covers a topic of general interest (such as Rita Emmett discussing Procrastination or Clutter Busting).

Events For the Whole Family

1. Find ways to blend events that are fun for kids and adults into your conference. Remember, kids enjoy making their parents proud and parents love watching their kids do something. Some conferences (especially a several-day one) put aside time toward the end for the kids to come on stage and perform while parents and the whole audience smiles, cheers, and send out loving support to the performers.
2. Ask your team to call Youth leaders at churches, and Scout leaders (especially Cub Scout Pack leaders who especially focus on family activities) for ideas for family fun. Ask what worked well and what bombed. Keep a notebook of tips, do's and don'ts if your organization plans to do this every year.
3. Design games and activities that the whole family can play together. Look for silly activities that will generate laughs and closeness, or have them work together creating a memento of the conference theme or city. You will delight the children if they can laugh at their parents doing something (such as writing a rap song that the parents have to try to sing first. Watching their parents "fast dance" is always good for a laugh.)
4. Instead of sending the family on a tour, plan a "hunt" combining sightseeing & solving clues. This gives the family a chance to be together and work together while touring the area.
5. If the families are going to eat together, remember that kids always eat faster and are ready to go long before the parents are. Plan something for the kids to do while the parents enjoy their meal.