

Kid-friendly reunion planning

by Edith Wagner

Some reunion planning activities will entice and fascinate kids, but adults often can't see the woods for the trees. One painfully obvious idea (which rarely even occurs to some planners) is to involve kids in planning kids' activities! Who knows better than kids what kids want to do? Who knows better what interests kids and even where kids want to go? Ask them and take their advice. There's a reason the kids are your future!

If your reunion has committees, ask kids to serve and listen to them. Some reunions have kids committees and if committees are fun, more kids are willing to serve. Many kids go to reunions regularly and look forward to seeing and catching up with their cousins.

But some kids are going to reunions for the very first time. Long before, when kids learn they'll be going to a reunion, they protest that they'll know no one there, ask one kid to start a round-robin letter or email to introduce themselves, and ask others to do their introductions, too. Face it! Some kids don't know their cousins, and an important purpose of the reunion is to get to know them. Start ahead.

Ask kids to produce a newsletter where they can introduce themselves and begin a dialogue to get to know one another. Or why not a blog? If there is even just one exchange, the kids can no longer say they'll know no one at the reunion.

Plan lots of age-appropriate activities. If there are many babies and toddlers at your reunion, organize a nursery and story time. Ask teenagers to help—or even ask them to organize activities for their younger cousins. Since the teenagers often earn their spending money babysitting, ask parents whose little ones are being entertained or supervised to reward their cousins. Let the older kids decide whether this is a volunteer or a for-hire event. Some families don't have teenagers at the moment, so consider a reunion budget item to hire a student to direct kids' activities, sports, lead songs or hikes, games

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and contests.

Know your kids and plan accordingly. Organize the equipment and supplies you'll need for planned activities. Bring bikes, skates and scooters. Bring board games, craft supplies, video games, CD players, DVDs, videos, children's books and lots of snacks.

Remember the Fourth of July games when you were a kid? Kids love them still: sack races, water balloon- or egg-tossing, three-legged races, relay races or scavenger hunts.

Plan activities for children and adults together to mix generations and branches of the family. Make up, design or develop personalized games just for your family. How about family bingo? Players must get answers to questions on the card, by talking to and learning about family members. Or a family trivia game: Who fought in World War II or Iraq? Who has twins? Who flew over the equator? Who was an Olympic rower? Who was born in Green Bay? Who was a Rockette?

How about a talent show? This is a great opportunity for all kids to show off their tap dancing or piano recital piece. It's an opportunity for cousins to get together and entertain each other: singing, dancing, playing instruments. It's a perfect chance to use that ballet tutu one last time—and an incredible opportunity to take pictures of the kids in action.

Plan your reunion near major attractions, such as amusement parks, aquariums, museums and areas of special interest to kids. Often these places offer group rates and promotional materials you can use to promote your reunion.

Have an awards ceremony just for kids. Celebrate every (and I mean every) accomplishment since the last reunion: promotions, graduations, awards and honors. Announce them, laud, applaud them, clap and stomp and shout about them. After all, if your own family can't be proud of you, who can?

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Encourage kids with tangible rewards: prizes, ribbons, certificates, plaques, medals, maybe even a little money. Many families provide scholarships for students at some or all levels of education. Some are small and some very generous, but all carry the whole family's pride in its next generation.

And finally—this is a family reunion, after all—add family history in ways that will entertain young and old alike. Re-enact family or historical events that affected the family. Kids can make a family tree or encourage older members to tell family stories. Ask kids to help collect their family's oral history. Then ask them to be the storytellers of what they've collected and through their retelling, they carry on family legend and history, which is one of the great purposes of having a family reunion.