

Junior Gathering 2017

Open House

This is the children's first real contact with your room and your staff. However, it is an OPEN HOUSE, meaning families who have more than one child may come and go, whereas those with only one may stay the entire hour! There may be siblings of various ages tagging along.

Think about fun ways to engage them and let them know about the group at the same time. Be sure to make the adults feel welcome and encourage them to share with you.

At the very end, you'll find [specific suggestions](#) from seasoned coordinators.

- Make everyone feel welcome, adults and children alike. Let the children know this is THEIR room. [Below are some ideas from past groups.](#)
- Have a designated staff person at the check-in table to make sure adults get the [information they need](#) and that we get the [information we need](#).
- Remember our families are diverse. Consider referring to “loved ones” or “families” rather than “moms and dads” or parents, to include those who may have come with grandparents or other relatives.
- All morning and evening staff should be present. (Some may need to “pop out for a bit” to take their own child to Open House.)
- Try to use the new group names – and images as much as possible, to help returning families to transition!
- Have a schedule for the week posted

Welcoming Ideas

- Post a **banner** that says “Welcome to (*Group name*)!” in big letters. Provide art materials for the children to decorate it.
- Have **each child's name** displayed: on the door, label cubbies, in the hall by the door, on the wall
- Encourage them to decorate their own Name Tags (adults and children)

- Set out an art project or game for all to play. Of course the project would be tailored to the age of the children – something they can do without assistance or interaction works best.
- Play music in the background
- Play a game like “Big Wind Blows” or Sing a song with children and parents together (this may be difficult with people coming and going – but might work if there is a core group that stays)

Info they need

- Routines/Expectations/Procedures
- Location of nearest restroom & water fountain
- Daily Schedule
- Week schedule – (reminder no JG on Wednesday evening)
- Typical and special activities
- Maybe stories you plan to use during the week
- Your rules for toys or other personal items
- What they need to bring: Sunscreen, bug spray, hat, change of clothes, etc.
- What they shouldn't bring: electronics, phones, etc.
- If you cannot answer any questions they have, refer them to the Junior Gathering Office

Info we need

- Be sure parents list **everyone** who can sign their child in and out.
- Show each parent the Parental Release form. Ask if they have anything to add or change. (Be sure to send any changes to the Junior Gathering office!)
- Remind them to double check **allergies** and any significant “life events.” In the past it has been helpful to know the child has recently lost a grandparent or a pet, that there has been illness in the family, or a move, a change of school, or a separation. On the more positive side – Grandma has moved closer, or the child has just learned to ride a bike – these can also be helpful for the staff to know. Sometimes parents think we only want medical or emergency information. It may take some thought to encourage the parents to share more information about “life events.”
- Make sure we have **everyone's cell number!** (parents, sponsors, others who may pick them up, etc.)

Notes from Three Experienced Coordinators:

I would emphasize that this is an **Open House**, meaning that parents will come and go. Many parents/loved ones have more than one child's room to visit, so they will stay for a while and then leave. Others have only one child at Gathering who needs to spend time in the new space and they will be there for the entire time. That said, it can be difficult to do any activities that involve all the children, so playing a game with everyone might not work well.

Children who have difficulty entering groups will need an activity that they can begin without having to negotiate interactions with other children yet. That is why the banner works well, along with materials that can be used without instruction. Clearly, kindergarten materials work well for those needs. Older children might be drawn to attractive art materials that are not intended for a special craft. (I just read and love Janet's feet activity. Wonderful!) I imagine decorating their name tags would be an attractive activity that is open-ended and easy to involve many coming and going. All that is to say that playing a game as a whole group seems problematic to me. Adults who need to take their child with them to another class will be delayed by a whole group activity. I do speak to all parents some times, but informally and only if there seems a lull in people coming and going.

I usually assign one of the staffers to be at the check-in table to make sure adults get the information they need and that we get the information we need. Adults need to know about things more than the sign-in sheets, after that information is confirmed and added. Who can sign-in and out and checking allergies, etc. is the most important by far. I was very glad to see that on the check list. I think we have told parents about bringing toys and how to keep them safe, etc. or other activities and routines that would be helpful for them to know. I try to post my daily schedule for parents to see. I often post the titles of the stories that I plan to tell or use so the adults will know about that too.

One year I was encouraged to never refer to families as "moms and dads" as I had a child that year with only moms. There are single parent families and families who had a parent die. Also, children arrive without parents, but with other family members such as grandparents. I now try to refer to "loved ones", "family" etc, when I tell the children that it is almost time for your families to come pick you up, etc.

-- Anne

I have always shown each **Open House** attender how to find the bathroom and the water fountain (or bubbler, as we say here in M'waukee).

They have lots of fun making paper FEET (tracing their own or their parents' feet, making duck or doggy or bear or dragon feet), coloring and decorating them, and gently taping them to the floor so anyone can find their way to the bathroom or bubbler. (Yes, these usually wear out in a couple days -- but by then even little baby brother knows where to find the facilities!)

If you put it in the "welcome" letter ahead of time, you can put each child's photo on the big poster; but this does not always work because some kids forget or lose their photo!

If a lot of kids are there at once (which for parents with multiple children does not always work out), you can sit in a circle and have each child share her/his name and a joke.

Make sure to have parents give you a FULL list of all their phone numbers (mom's cell, dad's cell, grandma's or auntie's cell, best-friend's-mom's cell, etc.)
-- Janet

I would recommend that all coordinators give the parents/guardians an idea of what the daily routine is like. This can be done by posting a typical agenda for each day. Also show them where you are going to post announcements so that they can look at them each day. Since parents and children are coming and going during open house, try to figure out a way to incorporate late comers and help those who have to leave feel comfortable.

-- Charlotte