

## Honey We're Taking The Kids!

What's good for families can be good for planners.

By Carolyn Koenig

A business trip is a business trip is a ... guilt trip? That's how many parents feel as they head out the door to their out-of-town meeting. Leisure time—particularly family time—today is so compressed that both generations feel the tug.

Increasingly, however, “Bye, Mom...” has become “BYE, MOM!” as the upsurge in family-friendly meetings with dedicated kids' programs lets your children buzz off to their on-site activities while you pursue yours. The kids' track began as an outgrowth of spousal programs, long a meetings staple.

Many factors spiked its surge, chiefly the increase in dual-income families and the increase in women traveling for business. One way that families have discovered to stay connected is to travel together, often adding a day or two pre- or post-meeting to make the trip a mini-vacation.

In a recent survey by Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell, a leading marketing research and consulting firm, nearly one-quarter of the respondents said they were likely to take their spouse and children on trips, combining business with pleasure, an increase over the previous year. And, says Gary C. Sain CTC CHME, chief marketing officer/partner, as long as the economy holds strong, the trend is likely to continue.



So, for parents, the desire is obviously there. But should your next meeting be a family friendly one? Are there benefits for the companies and organizations as well as the parents? Short of jumping in and planning all the details yourself, are there other options? And what are the things you should know? To make your job easier, we've found some answers and gleaned some tips from the experts.

### Good for you

Parents may seem to be the biggest beneficiary of including kids on your meeting agenda, but you and your organization can also reap the rewards. In one way, it's strictly a numbers game: by appealing to parents you can attract more attendees.

That holds true for Lauren Chelf, convention and exhibits manager for the Maryland-based Biophysical Society, who works with KiddieCorp, a national program provider. “Often both the mother and the father are scientists, and they wouldn't be able to attend without child care.” In fact, Chelf says, “the program is the reason why they come to our meeting rather than a competitor's.”

For single moms this is especially true; it's not even about adding a pleasure element to the trip. It's take-the-kids-or-they-can't-go, period. There are other advantages as well. Participants are likely to be more focused, more enthusiastic, less distracted by worry—or guilt. Planned children's activities are perceived by some association attendees as added value, a membership bonus like shuttle service or the opening night reception. And, for trade show veterans, the prospect of an organized program may be a relief, as problems often arise with children being on the show's floor.