

The Kids Are Alright

By Mike Ryan
a.k.a. Dr. Frankenstand

Expert advice for making youth entertainment seem like child's play

If you've seen the movie *Son In Law*, starring Pauly Shore, you probably remember the roly-poly, freckle-faced little brother Zack, played by Patrick Renna.

I did a wedding recently where the bride's son was a spitting image of Zack. Towards the end of the reception the Zack-a-like started watching me work. I'm a sucker for any kid who takes an interest in DJing, so I invited him to help me with some of the announcements. I was surprised to discover he was great on the mic! I took out one of my business cards and wrote on the back: "(his name) has fulfilled the requirements to become a Junior DJ. Then I signed it. Some kids might have thought that was a silly thing, but not him. His face lit up and off he went to show the card to his mother (the bride) who caught my attention and mouthed "Thank you"! The point of this story is that sometimes kids at parties can be a pain, but other times they can be a great opportunity to endear yourself to your client. Certainly that little boy will remember the time he became a "Junior DJ." Maybe he'll grow up to be a full-fledged DJ.

Controlled Chaos

Children present a unique element at any event in which they are involved. The following are some expert views from two DJs who specialize in children's events: Joe Kahwaty of DJ Entertainers, Freehold, New Jersey and Eric Sands of Sundance Productions in San Diego, California, Bar and Bat Mitzvah specialists.

Kawaty says because children have short attention spans, "you must keep activities as upbeat as possible." He agrees with the idea of letting certain kids on the mic: "...you might invite



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the children to be a guest DJ...the children love it, [and it] makes great photo opportunities and lasting memories for your clients, their family and friends."

Sands says, "It's all about control. If you give kids the opportunity to create chaos, they will. However, if you keep them continuously surprised and challenged, they will respect you for it, and respond to your show...They only act crazy because they need attention. You can give them the attention that they are demanding without being negative."

However, some DJs feel they have to be the star of the show with kids present; we've all seen it—they can and often do steal the limelight. Kawaty says: "In many cases children are the life of the party but sometimes they need to be invited to participate in activities or dances. It has been my experience that if you ask them they will

listen. Often the other guests will help you get the children involved."

Tips and Tricks for Kids

KEEP 'EM BUSY. Kahwaty says "you need to keep the activities going around all the other things happening at your parties. When you are done with activities try group dances. Some adults will actually enjoy doing the same activities provide to the children." Sands suggests giving "kids a role, maybe make them judges for an activity."

PROP 'EM UP. Kahwaty uses "hula hoops, limbo stick and sometimes Buddy Walkers® for out door parties. Sands is really into props: "Yes—plenty of props. Those illuminated squeazy balls are very popular right now. Also, glow-in-the-dark items will always win their favor (no pun intended). Air instruments are always fun, and using props for contests makes

a great impact (example: jumbo inflatable microphones, sunglasses, and various wigs for lip sync contests):"

HOW LONG? HOW MANY? What's the ideal timeframe for kid's parties and how many is too many kids? Kahwaty has a "three hour minimum with no max." He charges an additional fee for over 25 children. Sands says four hours is "maxed out" and at his Bar/Bat Mitzvahs the number of kids ranges from 30 to 80.

HELPERS AND/OR DANCERS. Kahwaty doesn't use dancers but does require additional assistance for each group of 25 children." Sands likes a helping hands: "Absolutely! Although you can call them dancers, or pumpers, or motivators...you need to have staff there to help execute your commands. One dancer for every 30 to 40 guests (kids and adults) is my rule of thumb."

ARE DJS GLORIFIED BABYSITTERS? Kahwaty says, "If the shoe fits wear it. I'm not ashamed to say I am a glorified baby sitter. Money talks!" Regarding parents he recommends: they "should know beforehand what they are getting into. Explain some of the activities you plan to do at their event. You will not have any problems unless you don't have the command of the activities you are planning to perform. If customers have any unreasonable demands, there are plenty of DJs they can call." Sands feel "parents don't really care how you get the job done. As long as you keep them occupied and entertained at the opportune times during the party."

WHEN GOOD KIDS GO BAD. Have you had to deal with out of control kids? Sands relates one incident: "In the early '90s, we got a bit rough with one kid who was trying to steal our CDs. Parents got mad and threatened to hire an attorney in response to our mishandling of this kid. We were forced to write a letter of apology to the family."

"There will always be troublemakers," he adds. "Don't alienate them...but embrace them into the party."

KID PARTIES ARE WORTH MORE. Exclusively child-attended parties require a lot more effort on the part of an entertainer. Are they worth charging more? Kahwaty says absolutely and recommends adding "a prize package (with) fun inflatables, leis, hats, sunglasses, etc. The prize packages you sell will generate much more business for you; you can take that to the bank." Sands agrees, he charges "almost twice as much for Bar/Bat Mitzvah parties than for all other parties." He feels that "to the hosts of the party, it's worth every penny." ■

Mike Ryan started out writing for news radio. He also DJ'd on KGB and KSDS. He mobiles as Mike on the Mike and is also the inventor owner of Frankenstand Powered Speaker Stands! Mike also works part time as a DMC tour guide. He has been the President of the San Diego Professional Tour Guide Association, a board member of his local NACE chapter and is currently the secretary of the San Diego Chapter of the ADJA.

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