

Short People

By: Graidhne ni Ruaidh

Many autocrats have asked what the needs are for children's activities at an event. Others have wondered what on earth they would do if anyone asked them to run children's activities at an event. I have tried to answer those questions here.

The Space

At an indoor event, children's activities should be near the main activity area. This allows parents to take part in the event, and yet keep an eye on their young ones as well. It gives those young ones a sense of being part of the activities, rather than hidden away in a far corner. The space should have tables and chairs for more children than are expected (there are always more children than are expected!), as well as a little room for parents and other adults to work with them. The space should be defined; one excellent chancellor minor I know has had success with a space set off by benches, so that during active games, the adults are actually sitting around the edge watching and cheering them on. I have had more success with rectangular tables instead of round ones; round tables leave the little ones just out of reach, so you can't quite get there before they smear the (glitter glue, paint, purple frosting, etc.) on their new garb. The space should be near the restrooms; the adult in charge should feel able to send kids to the restroom without fearing that they will be lost, and remember that even five and six year olds can become so focused on their activity that they don't notice that they have to go until it's almost too late.

An outdoor space must have sufficient shade. Tables and chairs are nice if craft sorts of activities are planned, but frequently an outdoor site will lend itself to more active and messy games that won't need the same sort of furniture. Still, at least one table makes the whole thing more flexible, and gives the adults in charge more options. This space should not be right next to the archery range or the thrown weapons range, and should be far enough from the list area that you can catch the little one before she crosses the ropes to give her fighter-daddy a big hug.

If some sort of space is set up for children's activities during court, it should be near the space where court will be held. Proximity to court will allow parents to pop in and out, share time keeping an eye on the short people, sneak out of the boring parts...

Kinds of Activities

When there is a theme for the event, try to suit the activities to that theme. It helps make the short people feel more a part of things, helps them to learn, and it's distinctly more fun. I try for a blend of activities, with some active games, some sit-down crafts, some storytelling, and something that they learn. I always aim for something that they can take away with them; a new game that they've made, a gift for their parents, a toy they made themselves, a craft item. I also try to put together a craft that the short people can present to the king and queen or the baron and baroness in court; the more often that they are in front of people and on their best behavior, the more quickly our children will become acculturated to this game we love so much.

I try to provide activities that can be adapted to more than one age group; the six to eight year olds will produce a far different painting project from the ones provided by the ten to twelve year olds. Frequently, I bring a puzzle or other project that is geared toward the older kids, something that they can work on their own if I know an older crowd will be there (painting scroll blanks and putting together a 3-D castle are among the things I've had for teens).

Miscellaneous needs

Is there a budget for the children's activities? I generally spend about \$25 on consumables for each event. That includes juice boxes, some kind of kid-friendly snack (fruit snacks, peanut butter crackers, apples, oranges, occasionally candy), paper, bubble fluid, craft items. There are also craft materials available in the children's activities box, including crayons, markers, origami paper (and books), paints. One or two appropriate kids books that can be read aloud are useful as well.

A sign up sheet at troll is often a good idea, though I don't always have one. There should never be fewer than two adults at children's activities; can you say "out-numbered?" I knew you could! Realistically, this means you shouldn't have fewer than three, because if you need to go find a parent, or the littlest one starts wailing that she **can't** possibly go to the bathroom by herself, or you need to find the appropriate diaper-changing parent **right now**, you will still have the required two adults present. (This one is a Society level requirement, and a wise one at that.)

Accept any and all offers of help. When Edmundo offers to teach juggling, or Brion offers to tell stories, or Antoinette offers to teach whitework, go for it! This doesn't mean time off from the activity, but it does mean more adults present, a possible bathroom break, a little time to focus on the next activity, a little clean-up time from the last activity.

Set a definite start-up and close-down time for activities. Post these at troll, as well as a schedule for any special activities you might be doing that might be a draw for the older kids. If you have an older-kid-activity that they can work on themselves, salt the mine: get one or two skills...er, interested helpers... to sit down and start working on it. Others will join them.

Meals

If activities start before lunch and lunch is provided, it is very useful to have someone bring a tray of kid-friendly foods to the children's activities space. Bread, cheese, fruit, cut veggies, are all things most short people will eat. Will there be a children's feast? Plan it out carefully; will it be simultaneous with the adult feast? Will kids be seated separately from the adult feast? If so, who will be with them? What will they do when they (inevitably) finish before the adults do?

Or, (in jest) we could chop them all up finely, put them in a big stewpot with rosemary for remembrance, simmer until tender...

Graidhne ni Ruaidh