

Make National Night Out “Child’s Play”

Children like to play. Children need to play. Children work hard at playing! Adults work hard and need to play. Adults and children benefit from playing. They develop an understanding of each other and learn while they have fun.

Involving young people in National Night Out (NNO) is fun and can have great long-term results. A 20-year study indicates that crime rates are lowest where adults and youths have strong connections with each other.

Many activities can bring youths and adults together. Here are some great activities from past NNO celebrations:

- ✎ Have young people select **“Neighbor of the Year”** and crown the person who has been the outstanding neighbor during the last 12 months.
- ✎ **Solve the mystery**—At the start of the gathering, assign each participant a role to play in a mystery. No one knows the identity of anyone else’s character until the game begins. Then people start acting out the mystery, revealing clues and sharing information that leads to solving the mystery. Some stores have kits available with all the information needed to plan the mystery, or creative hosts can make up the story and clues themselves.
- ✎ Put names of **famous people** on name tags. Place a name tag on the back of each participant without him or her seeing the name. Each participant can ask one ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question of each person at the party. The first person who guesses correctly is the winner.
- ✎ **Step forward**—have everyone line up, and anyone who can answer ‘yes’ to the leader’s question takes one step forward. The leader asks a question such as, “Have you lived in Minneapolis for more than five years?” The people who have take a step forward. The leader asks another question, such as “Have you played golf this summer?” Again, those who have, take a step forward. This is an opportunity for people to learn more about each other and gives residents something to talk to one another about as the night progresses.
- ✎ **Learn their interests**—Get the children together and have each child give one example of something he or she likes to do. Make copies of the list – without their names – and hand out. Have the adults try to figure out which child likes which activity. Adults cannot directly ask the child if they

like the specific activity but instead must ask other questions. So, if the list includes someone who likes to dance, the adult could ask if the child likes music, if he or she takes lessons, what kinds of music he or she likes, etc.

- ✎ Hold a **talent show**—have adults and children show off their skills. (You may have the next American Idol on your block!)
- ✎ Set up a **piñata** for kids (of all ages).
- ✎ Have a **block parade**—encourage children and adults to decorate bikes, trikes, wagons, strollers, pets, even spouses and then parade in style.
- ✎ Set up dog (and people) **agility courses**.
- ✎ Do a **“bookhead” race**—have kids race while balancing books on their heads.
- ✎ **Paint** an old car in watercolors.
- ✎ Hold a **“treasure” exchange** – everyone who brings a “gift” gets to take one home.
- ✎ **Play ball** – basketball, baseball or volleyball in the street.
- ✎ Put on a **skit or play**.
- ✎ Have a **scavenger hunt**, using clues that will take participants to a variety of neighbors’ homes.
- ✎ Set up a **campfire** in a grill or yard burner and tell stories.
- ✎ Play **board games**.
- ✎ Have the senior resident on the block tell about the **history of the block** and previous neighbors.
- ✎ Have an **egg toss, bob for apples** or have a **three-legged race**.
- ✎ Do **chalk art**.

Send your successful ideas to ccpsafe@ci.minneapolis.mn.us.

To learn more about the benefits of child’s play, visit www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/nno



Child's Play - Before and After National Night Out

Block parties build and strengthen your neighborhood community. "Child's Play" builds your child's language, thinking, creative, social and muscular skills. Continue building after NNO. Plan family and neighborhood events several times a year to build even more community on your block and create more support for play!

Give children time for "Child's Play"—with you, other children in a supervised setting and other families.

- ✎ **Encourage creativity**—Even empty boxes or a mud puddle can inspire children. Tap into their imaginations. Write stories and illustrate together, make up a song with pots and pans for drums. Cook, put puzzles together or make models.
- ✎ **Provide plenty of outdoor experiences**—Walk, shoot baskets, garden, skate, ski, go to the playground or just find things to do in the backyard. Stroll or bike to museums, construction sites or other interesting places. For more ideas, try the book, *Open the Door Let's Explore—Neighborhood Field Trips for Young Children* by Rhoda Redleaf, Redleaf Press.
- ✎ **Show children how to play games**—Card games, board games and physical games encourage friendly interaction and build relationships.
- ✎ **Make time** to talk and listen to your kids. Just spend time together—great conversations can come out of idle time.
- ✎ **Spread "Child's Play" in your neighborhood**—
 - ◆ **Make arrangements** for your child to have unstructured play with other children and to take part in many of the above suggestions with other children.
 - ◆ **Take the initiative**—Host "Child's Play" at your house or at a neighborhood park—let your neighbors know you'll be there with your children. Make it a weekly or monthly event and rotate hosts. Supply various sports equipment (or use the available park equipment), board games or arts and crafts supplies. Let the children play, and enjoy your own adult interaction time.

Keep young people and adults in contact

- ✎ **Concentrate on your children**—Turn off the TV, let voice mail answer the phone and spend time playing with your children doing some of the activities above or below.

✎ **Take the initiative**—Organize neighborhood events that involve kids and adults. There are many ways to do this; here are a few suggestions.

- ◆ Set up a baby-sitting co-op. This is a great way for children to meet a variety of adults on the block.
- ◆ Organize or host regular or one-time neighborhood activities—game night, walking, movies, library visits
- ◆ Organize neighborhood cleanup—Pick up litter (with treats afterwards) or remove graffiti ([See www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/graffiti](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/graffiti)).
- ◆ Start a theater group.
- ◆ Visit the library and talk with the librarian.
- ◆ Organize or attend a pancake breakfast.
- ◆ Visit a senior high rise.
- ◆ Tour the 911 center.
- ◆ Invite a speaker (anyone who would be interesting or educational).
- ◆ Organize adults on your block to tutor the other kids and the other kids to tutor the young children.
- ◆ Set up a block club newsletter.
- ◆ **Season-specific ideas**
 - Fall—Halloween block party, hayride, pumpkin decorating, watch the local football team (or play a game on your block).
 - Winter—Sledding, snow tubing, ice skating, ice fishing, snowman building contest.
 - Spring and summer—
 - Set up a community garden with a separate area for kids. Have experienced gardeners share their growing tips.
 - Organize a game (adults vs. kids or mixed teams)—softball, baseball, volleyball, kickball, kick-the-can or capture the flag.
 - Organize an outing—canoeing, golf, biking, watching a local sports team.
 - Host a neighborhood talent show.
 - **Try several ways to keep kids and adults having fun together!**

