

Child Care, Risk Management & Member Retention

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Most gym owners consider offering child care to members at some point, but does it make sense for your gym?

There are advantages to offering child care; it's a great benefit to members with children and can give your climbing gym a competitive advantage over gyms that don't offer child care.

On the other hand, it's difficult to create a child care program that generates revenue, so you have to carefully consider your financial model. Plus, child care presents additional liability, which you'll need to address with thorough risk management strategies.

The advantages and disadvantages to child care are numerous, but does it make sense for your business strategy, brand, and members?

Any new business offering is an investment, and while regulations for child care vary state to state, there are a few things to consider before deciding if offering child care is a good investment for you.

Do You Have the Real Estate for It?

If you are considering offering child care, the obvious first consideration is whether or not you have the real estate for it. Is there an area of your gym that you can re-purpose to a child care area?

The area that you use for child care needs to be appropriate for the children that you will care for – the last thing you want is to end up on an unhappy parent's blog.

When considering the type of space will need, you'll need to know:

- What are the regulations in your state for child care; child to care giver ratios, background checks, cameras in care areas, first aid and CPR certifications?
- What type of facilities do you need for infants and toddlers?
- Will you have a separate bathroom for child care?
- What type of child care do you want to offer: full-service, basic supervision, member co-op, an open play area, kids-specific classes?

What Do Your Members Want?

Polling your members is the easiest way to determine if child care is a service they would like to see offered. Survey questions should include:

- Would you use child care if it was offered?
- What child care services are most important to you?
- How many days a week would use it?
- What days and times would you use it?
- What are the ages of your children?
- Would you prefer to pay a monthly flat rate or per visit rate?
- What price range would you pay for child care? (list price ranges you are considering)

Risk Management of Child care

Risk management is simply anticipating situations that can lead to injury for members and taking steps to reduce the chance of those situations actually occurring. Implementing risk management is important as it reduces liability and expenses related to injury or harm.

Child care can be an outsized liability if it's not set up and managed correctly. Follow or exceed state regulations and be sure to consult with your insurance company every step of the way. Train all staff members on procedures and protocols with the child care program. Review your policies and procedures frequently.

You'll want to clearly outline your child care program. Define what you are able to offer and how you will manage different aged children. Outline to parents all policies that you put in place for how children will be cared for at your gym.

ROI

As a new business offering, it's important to weigh the investment, risk, and possible returns of offering child care. Once you've set up your space and invested in initial expenses, you may find yourself with a program that only breaks even financially.

Though child care fees may not be a significant source of revenue, the offering can have significant impact on member satisfaction and retention, while also attracting new members.

US Census data indicates that about 40% of families have children under 18 living at home. Both dual income families and single parent families find it difficult to use fitness facilities without

child care.

Despite the potential for a small ROI, it is increasingly common to see child care in climbing gyms because they can support your brand and strengthen your gym's community in immeasurable ways.

PIAT (Putting It All Together)

Depending on available space, the percentage of members that would use child care and how much they are willing to pay for it; you can determine whether or not child care in your gym makes sense.

- Know Your State's Regulations
- Ask Your Members What They Want
- Clearly Outline Your Child Care Program
- Balance the ROI of Revenue, Branding, and Member Retention

About The Author



Amanda Ashley is a writer, climber, and a climbing mom. From her early days spent training on the musty community woody in The School at the New River Gorge to training in modern mega climbing gyms all over the West, she's seen the rise of climbing gyms and the evolution of routesetting up close and personal for the past 20 years. Amanda writes about climbers, routesetting, changes in climbing movement and performance, and the climbing industry. Amanda's work has appeared in Climbing Magazine, Climbing Business Journal, and the Utah Adventure Journal.



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