

# Why Kids Matter At Indoor Climbing Gyms

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Staff and members alike often share a common complaint: too many children. While striking a balance between child-focused offerings and your adult population is challenging, with intention it can be executed beautifully.

## Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Tuesday 'Kirby' Kahl, who is a new writer at the CWA for 2024. She currently focuses on coaching, training, and programming and serves on the CWA Content Committee.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for management, coaches and trainers, and programming professionals in indoor climbing gyms.
- **What Will You Learn:** The monetary gains for investing in kids in your climbing gym, as well as some ways it helps develop your staff.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** We have extensive work on youth climbing teams, and kids in climbing gyms. [This article](#) gives specifics on monetary growth over time in your gym, though.

Youth climbers, whether in programs or not, are some of your most excited, engaged, and profitable members and customers.

This group, when catered to well, offers extraordinary longevity in the profitability in your gym and builds up your programming. They even offer the prospect of future employees who are well-versed in your gym's etiquette, programs and offerings.

# Consider the Future

No population aside from children will need gear as often, or purchase as many goods from your retail store. They will outgrow climbing shoes and harnesses as they age. Let's not forget the snacks and drinks either. Your retail purchases can be heavily driven by children and their families. If you get a singular child into programming, that child's siblings have the potential to get a membership or programming.

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The parents of a child may also get memberships and take classes, they'll need gear alongside their children. One of the children from a family may have a birthday party. A singular child can add dramatic value to your gym.

If you support a child from any age through your programming until they are 16 (or the working age in your state or gym), your staff have not only positively impacted their life but you now have an ambassador for your gym.

That team kid or child in youth programs could easily be a routesetter, summer camp counselor, desk staff member or even eventually work in management. I know dozens of fantastic employees who got their start through a birthday party, youth programs or climbing team. Some of you reading this may have been former team kids.

If we want to continue to have talented and experienced folks in our industry, we need to invest in the youth who will one day be running gyms, setting comps, and coaching their own set of future industry leaders.

All but two kids on my youth team (who are of age) work for us over the summer. A few aged-out team kids work at the desk too. The setting team at my current gym features several folks who once were team kids, as does our coaching staff.

The current older team athletes have a strong understanding of gym etiquette, they will even, when called for, mention fall-zone concerns to members and politely deliver safety feedback. They care about the health and safety of all and have developed communication skills to interact with the rest of the member base well.

This kind of communication and relationships takes time and development. It also pays dividends when you invest in this group and arm your coaches with group management skills.

# The Case for Birthday Parties

Birthday parties are the perfect entry point for a family or children into your gym. Birthday parties are highly profitable and offer an introductory programming role for your younger staff members. Consider ensuring you have a staff member who can speak to your programs, memberships and offerings.

This staff member can contact the family, ensure they have a beautiful experience, and suggest offerings that fit the family's needs. While running a birthday party program at a large commercial gym, my team would have a core group of birthday hosts with a lead host for each party. Toward the end of the party the lead host would give a one-month free membership to the party family and a brochure about our youth programs. It's a great idea to connect with the parents of any children in the party who seem particularly interested in climbing.

If you have the space for multiple parties at a time, consider offsetting the times and having a consistent flow for each party so the parties don't interact. With one party space, you can host 3-7 parties per weekend and with two, that doubles.

Depending on your area, rates can range between \$150-\$400 for a single party with the only major costs associated being payroll and some supplies that can be bought in bulk.

Between the profitability of a party and the funnel into your programming, they are a great introduction to your gym for folks outside of your standard population as they consistently bring new people into the gym.

## Staff Development Through Program Expansion

The more we embrace intentional and expansive youth programming, the more offerings we give our staff to learn and develop as coaches and movement specialists.

Program expansions generally call for additional leadership, creating the often hard-to-obtain career pathway in the indoor climbing industry. Career pathways encourage staff retention and build future leaders in the climbing industry.

While there are challenges to building successful and effective youth programming, embracing your youth population can bring immense value to your community, staff, and gym future.

Some must-haves for this process include group management training for your coaches, an open-minded staff who excel in building relationships, and thoughtful youth offerings. This won't be the answer for every gym, but gyms in suburban or residential areas can benefit greatly from embracing youth members.

# Attend Tuesday Kahl's Pre-Conference Session!

The 2024 CWA Summit is offering loads of pre-conferences for coaches and trainers. This is a quick and easy way for your coaches & trainers to get the most out of their CWA Summit, and deliver some real ROI for your gym. Tuesday's session is about **Coaching & Cueing, don't miss it!**

## About the Author



Tuesday "Kirby" Kahl is a movement specialist, passionate instructor, and athlete. She currently coaches at Movement in Portland, Oregon. Kirby has worked every job in a climbing gym, from manager, retail buyer, routesetter, and everything in between, but her true passion is instruction. Kirby's primary populations are youth and adaptive competitive athletes, but she loves assisting climbers of all ages and abilities and helping them reach their goals. She is a student at Portland State University studying Applied Health and Science and will attend physical therapy school once she finishes her studies at PSU. She has been coaching for the last 15 years across several sports, enjoying a bubbling career as a swim coach before falling in love with climbing. You can find her bouldering, multi-pitching, competing, or backcountry skiing when she's not in school or coaching. Off the wall, she's a dedicated plant mom and painter.



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