



No Kidding:

Attracting “Little Regulars” Can Make
a Big Difference to Your Bottom Line

It's a time-honored tradition: If parents want to enjoy an excellent meal away from home, they make two calls—one to the restaurant for reservations, and the other to the babysitter who'll be watching the kids.

But times they are a-changin'. More and more restaurants are recognizing and exploring the profitable possibilities of attracting parents and their kids. Not only do check averages increase when little ones are in tow, but operators who appeal to whole families can benefit from an unflagging trend. According to a recent National Restaurant Association poll, 55 percent of adults say their kids influence whether the family eats out—and a full 47 percent say their children determine which restaurant the family will visit.

"Parents are having children later in life, and they want to feel welcomed dining out with their kids," says Focus Marketing owner Tressa Mills, whose company offers a variety of kid-targeted marketing materials. "The entire kids segment is such a powerful, powerful market."

So how does a restaurant tap into this profitable segment without isolating their childless regulars? Some say it's all a matter of perspective.

"I think most businesses believe that in order to welcome kids into their establishment, they need to be kid-focused," says Hillel Cooperman, editor of TastingMenu.com. "In fact, I think most parents would prefer an establishment that's adult-focused, but kid-savvy."

Cooperman says operators can help create a "kid-savvy" environment by encouraging their wait staff to follow a few simple operational techniques:

- Assist parents by delivering free kid-friendly appetizers (such as bread or crackers) to the table almost immediately after the family sits down.
- Drop the check with the last dish so that parents can pay and be free to leave if the responsibilities of parenthood demand it.
- Be ready to take the order for the entire meal when taking the beverage order. The sooner young children receive their food, the happier they are likely to be.

In addition, there are several more tangible solutions operators can employ.



"The entire kids segment is such a powerful, powerful market."

—Tressa Mills, Owner
Focus Marketing

Items such as activity placemats and menus, colorful balloons, kids' tattoos customized with restaurant logos, and kid-targeted menu inserts can go a long way toward keeping children engaged—and turning them into what Mills calls "little regulars." Restaurants can also deliver kids' meals in Frisbees or buckets that children can keep, seat cuddly teddy bears in high chairs next to infants, make children the "winners" of scoops of ice cream—and, of course, keep plenty of child seats on hand.

Restaurants where parents can enjoy a good meal with their children can be hard to find, yet becoming one of those establishments can spell increased profitability for the operator. All it takes for an adult-focused restaurant to become a kid-savvy destination is a little planning, some carefully chosen tools—and a desire to tap into a market segment whose "little regulars" promise big bottom-line returns.

Cater to your smallest customers with the additional ideas found online at www.menufocus.com.