



Kids Just Want to Have Fun

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When I began moderating, I was a mother of three (soon to be four) very young children and was coming from the world of kids' cereal product management. It was a natural fit that I would focus on moderating projects for kids. As a qualitative researcher who works on both adult and kid projects, I have found that the challenges of keeping 4- to 12-year-old kids actively engaged in two-hour focus groups are different from adult groups. However, I've found some effective techniques to keep them invested in the group activities.



Get comfortable. Create some time for the kids to acclimate to the focus group facility before the start of the group. A kid who shows up moments before a group begins is often hungry and disoriented. Consider offering an Early Bird Drawing—where any kid/parent team that shows up at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the group has a chance to “win” an extra \$50, which they get to split. By encouraging the parent/kid team to arrive early, the child can go to the bathroom, get a bite to eat (having pizza in the waiting room works great), etc., which puts the child in a better mindset. Be sure to hold the drawing at the completion of group so kids do not go into group disappointed they “lost.”

Meet and greet. You will want to dispel fear of the unknown and explain the rules. It also makes parents more comfortable letting their kids participate, because the parents get to see and interact with the person who will be with their child for the length of the group. A moderator should spend five to 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the group in the waiting room, talking to each child, explaining what will happen during the group and answering the parents' questions.

Show and tell. Even adults exhibit the “deer in the headlights” mind freeze when asked a question, so to make the beginning of the group that much easier for and interesting to the kids in the room, have the kids bring three things from home that they can use in their introduction. For example, if you are talking about a specific toy category, ask the children to bring their favorite toy in that category and two other things that they really like. Have them bring these items to group in a nonsee-through bag so there can be an unveiling. Kids like to show and explain what they brought, and the other kids in the room are interested to see what others brought. This sometimes even elicits kid-to-kid probing around the very topic the research is about.

Prevent distractions. Have the kids sit directly on the floor. No cushions, no cute beanbag chairs, nothing that can be thrown, moved, poked, or used as a distraction. Another benefit of having the children sit directly on the floor is that they are not rooted to one spot, and as you show them things their body movement can be insightful (e.g., if you uncover a new toy and no kid moves closer to see it, then you might have a dud on your hands, no matter what the kids say).

Mix it up. To keep the energy level high in the room, mix up the methodology. Younger kids can get bored easily, and some kids especially have trouble sitting still. Different types of visual exercises work great and also allow the kids to get up and move around while they are actively participating in the discussion. For example, create team assignments: If you are exploring different brands, create cards with brand logos. Each team of kids gets a similar card deck to sort into “I like a lot,” “it’s okay” and “I don’t like” piles. Or, if you are talking about different packaging designs, spread them all out in a line on the floor parallel to the viewing mirror and tell the kids to stand behind the one they love best. Probe kids as they are standing.

Go and have fun!

Susan Fader founded [Fader & Associates](#) in 1988, which focuses on fusing qualitative research with strategic thinking on her return from working in Japan. Many of the techniques Susan has developed for research with kids also are very effective in her adult CPG, medical and creative diagnostic/new business qualitative research studies. Susan has been member of the [Qualitative Research Consultants Association](#) for more than 20 years.