

---

# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

---

## Squats and Tots

Four CrossFit affiliates share their strategies for keeping kids safe and minimizing the logistical headaches of gym-based child care.

By Hilary Achauer

September 2015

---



Courtesy of Chris Rosa

Tacheena Rubio drives a long way to work out. There are CrossFit gyms closer to Rubio's house, but she makes the hour-long commute to CrossFit Wilmington in North Carolina because the affiliate offers something others don't: child care. Rubio has three girls, ages 1, 8 and 13.

"The main reason for choosing this gym was the child care," Rubio said.

---

1 of 7

Child care is a wonderful amenity for a CrossFit affiliate, but it brings with it a host of responsibilities for the owner. Affiliates such as Wasatch CrossFit in Utah, CrossFit West Sacramento in California and CrossFit Wilmington have engineered creative solutions that take the onus off the affiliate owner but still allow the business to offer a service that separates it from the competition.

Some affiliates, such as CrossFit Eminence in Thornton, Colorado, don't offer child care but instead provide a kids area, typically within view of the workout space. That, too, brings challenges. It's been said that **children are like tiny drunk adults**, and an unsupervised group can wreak havoc on the most kid-friendly space. Bringing children into an affiliate requires a delicate balance between satisfying the parents and making sure the space doesn't turn into a crumb-covered Gymboree.

### The Co-Op

Damon Stewart has owned Wasatch CrossFit in Layton, Utah, since May 2007, and he's had a child-care program since August of that year.



***Child care can be the difference in whether or not parents decide to join a gym, but it requires careful planning and oversight.***

Wasatch CrossFit offers child care from 9 to 11 a.m. Monday through Friday, from 4 to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday, and during the 10-a.m. workout on Saturday. The child care was formerly included in the membership price, but Stewart just added a charge of US\$20 per month per family for use of child care.

Stewart said he has two goals for the program.

"No. 1 is that the kids are safe. No. 2 is that no drama ever reaches me," Stewart said.

Stewart accomplishes both of his goals by employing a manager who's in charge of the program and staffing the hours with moms who use the service for their own children. It's a co-op model in which members trade hours providing child care for a discount on their membership. Stewart said he likes this set-up because he feels the moms care more than a stranger working for \$10 an hour.

The child-to-caregiver ratio in Wasatch CrossFit's child-care room is about one caregiver for every 10 kids; for the baby room it's one caregiver for four kids. The numbers of kids increase in the summer, so in order to avoid overwhelming the space, Stewart offered a CrossFit Kids program for the older children.

Before starting the program, Stewart looked into Utah's licensing regulations governing child care. He found that because the parents are less than five minutes away from their kids (in the same building, actually) and because food isn't served, Wasatch CrossFit is exempt from regulations governing traditional daycare facilities.

That didn't stop them from getting investigated.

"We got audited by the state for our child-care program," Stewart said. "They told us we exceeded their standards, and they loved what we were doing."

Licensing regulations vary from state to state, so it's important to research what constitutes a state-regulated child-care facility in your area.

Stewart said his advice to affiliates looking to offer child care is to focus on safety first. Then, he suggests letting go of some of the responsibility.

"We've empowered great people to do a great job," Stewart said. "The good ideas all come from the moms. They plan structured activities, and they have a budget so they can buy things like big rolls of paper for the kids to do art projects."

The child-care area is completely separate from the main workout space, but there are two big windows where

parents can peek in if they feel the need. Stewart said he plans to install video monitors so parents can easily check on their kids.

---

### Licensing regulations vary from state to state, so it's important to research what constitutes a state-regulated child-care facility in your area.

---

For Stewart, offering child-care helps him set his affiliate apart from other gyms.

"It's a competitive differentiator," Stewart said. "We're in Utah, and everyone has kids. Gyms are dead between 9 and 10 a.m.," he said, so it made sense to fill the time with people who are home with their kids.

The program makes more than a competitive difference, though.

"The moms are the heart and soul of our gym," Stewart said. "The co-op child-care model has brought the mid-morning group together even more—there's nothing like taking care of another person's child to create a sense of closeness."

### Outsourcing

Rick Larson, owner of CrossFit West Sacramento, started his affiliate's child-care program after a few near misses involving unsupervised kids.

"We thought we were being nice, and we let (the kids) sit off to the side with an iPad watching a movie," Larson said. This policy ended up being a serious safety issue.

"The kids want to mimic what's going on," Larson said. "We had a couple of close calls, and you can't run that risk."

Unlike Wasatch CrossFit's 7-year-old program, CrossFit West Sacramento has only been offering child care since February 2014.

Not wanting to get into the daycare business, Larson came up with an innovative solution. He contracted with Amber Roumiguere—a CrossFit West Sacramento member who is also a teacher with child-care experience—to run the program as her own business.



Courtesy of Kenny Hoff

*In some gyms, child care is provided before or after kids workouts, allowing parents to train in the same trip.*

It's called Little Heroes Childcare, and it operates separately from the affiliate. Roumiguere offers child care two nights a week and charges \$3 an hour, or members can buy a \$25 punch card that discounts the rate to \$2.50 an hour. Roumiguere manages the schedule; sometimes a parent arranges with her to come early or stay late.

The most important thing, for Larson, is that he doesn't have to be a part of these negotiations.

"I don't need another thing on my plate," Larson said. "It's way out of my realm of expertise. I'd rather write workouts, manage the coaching staff and run the business. I don't charge her to use the space. It's a perfect ancillary program."

The child-care hours follow the CrossFit Kids program on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so kids can go from their CrossFit Kids class into the child-care program while mom or dad completes a workout.

Larson runs an endurance class outside the gym while CrossFit Kids is taking place inside. Immediately after the endurance and CrossFit Kids classes, at 6 p.m., child care begins and a CrossFit class starts inside.

This scheduling allows the entire family to participate in the gym's activities. Larson said he would have lost members if

child care wasn't available, because it's the only way some parents can work out.

Little Heroes runs in empty office space that's part of the gym. CrossFit West Sacramento is in an office park and has about 2,100 square feet of usable workout space. There's an additional 1,000 square feet of office space, so Larson converted one of the offices into the daycare area.

"It's a separate area," Larson said. He said this works well because young children don't worry about what their parents are doing.

"Before they even know it, they are being picked up," Larson said.

According to California's licensing laws, a facility is exempt from regulations governing daycare facilities if temporary child-care services are offered while the parents are on the premises.

"The kids love it, especially the preschoolers who do CrossFit Kids," Larson said. For those kids, their time in care is like a continuation of CrossFit Kids.

Larson said he'd love to see the program expand, but Roumiguere has a full-time job and a family herself, so she might have to hire additional staff.



Courtesy of Kenny Hoff

*For Amanda and Joe Welliver (center), having child care at CrossFit Wilmington helped them prepare to compete at the 2013 Reebok CrossFit Games.*

"It's been a positive thing throughout," Larson said of the pilot program. "It's nice for mom and dad to know kids are secure and supervised vs. being unsupervised. It's comforting for them to know the kids are safe."

### The Club House

Like Wasatch CrossFit, CrossFit Wilmington has been around since 2007. Its child-care program, which has been operating for about two years, is run by 26-year-old Stephanie Geissler, who manages the staff and the facility. Geissler is also a coach at the affiliate.

Geissler has 11 brothers and sisters, and she's worked in a daycare since she was 16, so she brings years of experience to the position. She employs two other women and sometimes brings in more help as needed.

Child care is open to kids from 6 weeks to 12 years and covers the 9-a.m. class as well as all the evening classes, starting at 5 p.m. Child care is also open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. until noon. The cost is \$5 for a drop-in, \$40 a month for unlimited child care for one child, and \$60 a month for unlimited child care for two or more children.

"We have them for an hour, change diapers, play with them," Geissler said. "We have a really big room because the facility is huge."

The extensive, well-run child-care program is why Rubio drives an hour each way to work out.

"CrossFit Wilmington has a good reputation," Rubio said, "but this (the child care) was a double positive."

Rubio said she knows a lot of mothers who are interested in CrossFit, but the No. 1 reason they don't join an affiliate is the lack of child care.

The child care at CrossFit Wilmington is especially important to Amanda Welliver and her husband Joe, who have a 3-year-old boy. In 2013, they competed on the CrossFit Wilmington team at the CrossFit Games. Amanda, a former college volleyball player and competitive beach-volleyball player, and Joe, a track athlete, both work full time.

"For us, trying to prepare for (the Games), we had to have some help because we had to be there at the same time," Amanda said. Instead of working out one at a time while taking turns caring for their son, "we could get our workout done together and with the team at the same time. That was invaluable."

Amanda said her son adores Geissler and loves going to the gym.

"My husband is a football coach, so in the fall it's like I'm a single mom, so I definitely heavily rely on (child care) during that time," Amanda said.

She likes that the child-care area is separate from the rest of the gym.

"For me, going to the gym is my time," Amanda said. "I'm either a mom or I'm not. (I like) being able to focus on one task at home, and I'm free for (my son) for the rest of the night."

---

**Geissler said her No. 1  
recommendation for affiliates  
thinking about offering child care  
is to have every parent fill out a  
liability form for every child.**

---

Geissler said her No. 1 recommendation for affiliates thinking about offering child care is to have every parent fill out a liability form for every child. She keeps the forms in a binder and uses them to keep track of any allergies, special needs, requests and payments. She also sanitizes the toys at the end of every night to prevent germs from spreading.

CrossFit Wilmington has a lot of space, so care is spread out over three rooms.

"We have the older kids in a space with a Wii they can use. The younger kids have their play area, and then the common area. It gives them space to move around," Geissler said.

The child-care area is also the only part of the gym that's air conditioned, which comes in handy during the hot North Carolina summer.

Geissler said instead of just passing time while their parents work out, the kids look forward to their time with her.

"They've all made great friends with the other kids. It's like clubhouse," she said.



Courtesy of CrossFit Illumine

*Affiliate owners agree kids spaces should be governed by very clear rules to ensure safety and good behavior.*

### Spaces for Kids

Some affiliates don't have the option to provide child care, either because of space restrictions, state licensing requirements or lack of human resources.

To provide some type of child-care option for members with children—and to avoid kids running around on the workout floor—many affiliates have a separate kids area. CrossFit Eminence has a 400-square-foot area designed to keep children safe and out of the way during class time. The space, near the front door, has been in use since the affiliate opened three-and-a-half years ago.

"Parents have to sign in the kids each time they drop them off," said Lindsey Marcelli, who runs the affiliate with her husband, Kris.

The sign-in sheet is important because it gives the affiliate a record of the exact arrival and departure time of each kid, which Marcelli said is important for insurance reasons. The rules are also displayed right by the sign-in area.

"We don't allow food and drink," Marcelli said. Some other rules forbid sick kids from the area and keep children off

the gym floor, and the kids must be able to entertain themselves quietly for the duration of the class. If a child is screaming, the parents have to stop their workout and come get their child. Coaches are not responsible for babysitting or monitoring the children.

---

**"Kids will be kids, but we expect their parents to act like the grown-ups they are." —CrossFit Eminence**

---

"Some people hate kids," Marcelli said, so she's careful to make sure the affiliate doesn't feel like a daycare. And even people who love kids don't want to listen to crying during a workout.

The kids space is fully visible from all over the gym.



Courtesy of Charlie Wade

**As a side benefit, many children will learn to love fitness by watching their parents train and improve their health.**

"Well, you can sneak in one area where kids can't see you," Marcelli said of parents who would like a respite from the watchful eye of their toddler. Nevertheless, the visibility of the kids area means parents are able to keep an eye on their children and stop problems before they begin.

A short wall borders the kids space on two sides. One side of the half wall consists of cubbies for the members; on the other side of that wall—which is the inside of the kids' area—is a whiteboard. The other interior wall of the kids area is painted with chalkboard paint so the kids can draw everywhere.

"We have a futon couch for them that we can lay down or fold up. They love that thing," Marcelli said.

There's a bin of donated toys and books, including coloring books and crossword puzzles.

"We used to have a TV, but when the music gets loud (the kids) can't hear it," Marcelli said.

During the busiest time, the space has about eight to 10 kids, and the ages range from babies to 12-year-olds. CrossFit Eminence also has a CrossFit Kids program, so the young athletes use the space to hang out before and after class.

As with any common space, the success of the kids area at CrossFit Eminence depends on cooperation from everyone. Rule No. 7 summarizes this nicely: "The Kids Box is a drama free zone. Kids will be kids, but we expect their parents to act like the grown-ups they are. If too many conflicts and grievances arise between parents and their kids, we reserve the right to close the Kids Box and turn it into a Coaches' Minibar."

### Safe and Happy

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for child care in the gym. Many affiliates don't have the demand or space to offer child care or provide a kids room. However, for some affiliates, offering care options is a good way to attract and retain members, as well as build a sense of community.

Affiliates who offer child care must be aware of their state's regulations and clearly communicate their in-house rules to parents and kids. And other members must also be considered.

The ideal solution is the one that keeps the kids safe and happy while allowing all members to freely pursue their fitness.



### About the Author

*Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing articles, online content, blogs and newsletters, Hilary writes for the CrossFit Journal and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. An amateur-boxer-turned-CrossFit-athlete, Hilary lives in San Diego, California, with her husband and two small children and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit [hilaryachauer.com](http://hilaryachauer.com)*