

10 steps for organising a profitable parent open day



an in-depth guide

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Meet the expert

Blossom Educational spoke to Nigel Rolfe, CEO of the successful Cherry Childcare Ltd, which consists of 11 thriving day nurseries in the South East of England. Nigel and his team began their nursery journey in 1993, growing their premises due to an excellent nursery ethos and learning offer. Paired with Nigel's business background, this resulted in the perfect balance between nurture and company success. He shares his 10 top tips for preparing and running a successful and profitable open day for your nursery.



Nigel Rolfe, CEO of the successful Cherry Childcare Ltd.



Benefits



Mistakes



10 steps

What are the benefits of running a nursery open day?

Open days can be an excellent opportunity to engage with the local parent community. They offer opportunities for potentially gaining new sign-ups and planting the seed with new parents who may be considering nursery placements in the next few months or years. Open days can be a traditional event (not too dissimilar to a school fete or fair) or a response to number drops.

Regardless of the motive, the end goal is to leave a positive, lasting impact on those who attend, eventually making financial gains through enrolment. Following several lockdowns, private nurseries now recognise the influence online presence has on generating new leads. They are moving to utilise effective marketing strategies, including running open days.

Open days can give future clients and families a taste of your nursery's ethos, but not every nursery prepares and runs them well, explains Nigel, "It is necessary to prepare them with a business focus; ultimately, running an open day must offer value for money."



Common mistakes when organising a nursery school open day

Not highlighting the reasons to go

Nigel explains that there must be a key and attractive reason for families to attend nursery open days. Too often, nurseries don't recognise the importance of organising interesting activities to draw in the local families. Opening the doors and simply showing the prospective parents the setting and facilities won't create the desired hype when delivering an open day; it must be full of stimulating activities to pull them in!

Poor financial planning

When deciding which exciting activities you may offer prospective parents and their children, the cost must be the primary driver for your choice. Choose ideas that will be affordable, easy to organise, and manageable for your staff.

Nigel describes how easy it can be to fall into the trap of buying small items, decorations, and snacks without carefully pre-planning a budget. The trick is to identify the available funds dedicated to the open day and monitor spending on the build-up to the day itself; this includes staff wages.



Limited follow up after your open day

Pre-registration is one of the critical tips Nigel recommends for planning an open day. This gauges the interest to ensure enough activities, resources and staff are available on the day.

Additionally, this allows for vital follow-up emails and calls to encourage potential new clients to pop in during opening hours for a nursery visit when the learning is in full flow.

“A common mistake nurseries make with open days is advertising and entertaining all that come through the door, with no benefit to the nursery itself,” *Nigel Rolfe, CEO of the successful Cherry Childcare Ltd.*



How often do you host open days

It takes a lot of preparation and organisation to plan and deliver a fantastic open day to engage the local families and potential clients. Of course, this demands tremendous focus from yourself and your nursery staff. Don't overdo the number of open days you offer at your nursery, Nigel warns, as this can damage staff morale. The need to work additional hours (even if paid) and the preparation of the nursery setting to a higher standard than every day can take its toll on the staff's engagement and enthusiasm for participating in the open days.

"A maximum of 2 open days per year is plenty," Nigel Rolfe, CEO of the successful Cherry Childcare Ltd.



Operating hours of the nursery's event

When organising an open day, nursery managers can often think the opportunity to see the nursery in full flow is appealing to parents, and it is! However, this can be done as a personal individual tour around the nursery at another time. The already stretched staff ratios may not be able to survive an open day which requires staff to show around the setting rather than support in rooms.

Not planning activities according to vacancies

Nigel recommends carefully considering your open day's target age and analysing projected numbers for the next 6-9 months before designing your open day.

"Many nurseries may find their baby room will soon be lower in numbers, yet offer activities aimed at 3-year-olds during their open day," explains Nigel. Ensure you cater for activities that are relevant for the age range for which you have current or future spaces available.



How to plan your nursery open day

Know your nursery market

Not all working structures and families will be a good fit for your setting, and that's okay! You may be a day nursery operating between 8 am–6 pm all-year round, and your target market is working parents. Or you may be a term-time setting closely linked to a feeder primary school that offers before and after child care as well as day places.

Whatever setting structure your nursery falls into, your open day should be centred around your majority type of client. For a nursery where the main demographic is working parents, organising an open afternoon on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday will be poorly attended because those days are the most popular for nursery spaces, meaning parents are working. Therefore, a weekend open day may be a more suitable option for these target parents.



Remember to showcase aspects of your nursery ethos and structure that will be attractive to the type of parent you aim to engage. This includes aspects such as: flexibility on booking around working shift patterns, wrap-around before and after school care for additional children, regular and straightforward updates and payment options via your communication app.

Knowing your target market extends beyond the timings and organisation of the open day event; it includes the marketing and advertising options you will also consider. Gather information on advertising on social media platforms to engage new, first-time parents in the local area or target those with more than one child by advertising in local playgroups, swimming baths and child-friendly cafes.



**Working
Parents**



**Flexible
Booking**



**Child
Care**



**Parent
Updates**



**Payment
Options**

10 steps to running a successful nursery open day

Calendar check

When setting a date for your open day, look at the calendar for notable events that might help – or hinder – the success of your event. Calendar clashes can mean lower attendance or less staff availability to support the event. Here are a few calendar considerations to take on board when setting a date:



Bank holidays

Coinciding with bank holidays can mean more families are looking for additional activities with which to engage their young children for the long weekend, meaning higher attendance. However, it can also be the perfect time for a long weekend away as a family (for your potential attendees and your staff). Take care to consider avoiding a weekend that might fall in the middle of bank holidays.

Local events

Scan the horizon of local events scheduled for the same date or weekend. This may include local football tournaments for additional children, school fetes or fairs, and library open days. Competing against another local setting can be a challenging position to be placed in when being mindful of the budget available for the event.

You can time your open day to begin after other events if you feel this will bring more purposeful footfall into your nursery as families may be out and about already. A team discussion to decide the best plan of action is necessary.

Time of the year

July is a busy month in nurseries, with handovers completed for those progressing to primary school and their Early Years Profile due. High workload pressure for your team with their own families and children moving to new schools and classes makes July not the ideal time for an open day!

Your staff will be tired, and your date of choice may coincide with family holidays and other summer holiday events. Nigel suggests one of the best times for an open day is in October, before the Christmas rush and once new children (or staff) who have joined the setting have settled in.



Day structure

Nigel suggests the ideal time slot for an open day is 10 am – 2 pm. This gives the families ample time to get to swimming lessons, football practice, visit family, and still have time to pop in and enjoy the activities you have prepared. If you choose any activities that involve food (pizza making, cookie decoration), they can be perfectly timed with mid-morning or afternoon snack times.



Pre-registration

A non-negotiable for organising an open day, Nigel emphasises, is that each nursery has a pre-registration form to first measure interest levels and, importantly, to give follow-up opportunities. There are free website options such as Eventbrite, where a free event can be created, and parents will book a ticket, with options to email all attendees for follow-up emails.



Cost vs potential

Using your pre-registration as a measure, the types of activities you decide on and their subsequent resource cost should be organised. Nigel explains that using modern, online advertisements rather than the old-fashioned leaflet drop can be a much more effective method of reaching a wider audience. He suggests weighing up the cost vs potential financial gain when running an open day, it may be more effective to use platforms such as Facebook to advertise your setting instead.



Plan staffing carefully

Most open days run on a Saturday or Sunday to allow working parents the chance to participate. This often exceeds your team's usual working hours and will require additional staffing. Commonly, nurseries will organise time in lieu of the hours worked on the open day or will pay staff the extra hours for their time.

Time in lieu can reduce the overall cost of the open day. However this should be used with caution as the hours owed could be used during times that coincide with busy days, making the meeting of ratios impossible and causing more challenges.

"It can be easier to pay staff for the hours worked during the event rather than coordinate time in lieu, especially when there are multiple staff members to accommodate, creating scheduling nightmares." *Nigel Rolfe, CEO of the successful Cherry Childcare Ltd.*



Activity hooks

Your choice of activities offered during the open day can be the hook needed to get the parents through to doors. This could be the first step in enrolling their child with your nursery. Choose appropriate, engaging, cost-effective activities that include the targeted age group.

Nursery ethos

Your nursery is unique for its own reasons; celebrate them! If you have a Montessori approach like many of Blossom's nurseries, choose to engage with natural and creative materials to allow self-driven creativity. Your nursery may have an underpinning in supporting Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; ensure the activities you offer are fully inclusive and advertise them.

Take the opportunity to have your nursery rooms showcasing the types of learning you encourage, loose parts with the curiosity approach, sensory activities for tactile inclusion, and communication and language to bridge speech gaps in areas of high deprivation.



Advertise your open day effectively

Posters, banners, and leaflets are all useful advertising methods. They allow those who may pass the nursery on the drive to work, the school run, or on local errands to see where and when the open day will take place. It should be noted that these methods do have associated printing costs.

Most nurseries post-covid lockdown are becoming more online commercially savvy, Nigel explains. The use of social media platforms (both paid and free advertising) is essential for reaching a broader and more specific audience. Create an event post on Facebook (using the parent's profile as the follow-up contact method) and encourage all local child-service businesses to share it, and return the favour by sharing their open days or offers when they advertise.



Follow up after the event

An essential aspect of open days is gaining valuable contacts from potential future families who will join your nursery. By running an open day without taking details of those who attend, you are offering activities that the local families will enjoy on the day but with no future financial gain for the nursery itself.

By pre-registering interest, simple, non-pushy emails can be sent with a booking form or contact details to reach out to the nursery manager to book a personal tour of the facilities during the operating hours. It can also be helpful as a contact pool to advertise your role vacancies and gain additional staff or volunteers.



★ Let the journey begin!

Planning and delivering a fantastic open day can be a significant amount of hard work from the whole team, and, if organised well, can pay off in helping you to fill and grow your nursery.

Remember that a successful open day rests on tracking and follow up. So be sure to put measures in place that allow you to contact attendees after the day, and determine your event's ROI.

Calendar check



Day structure



Pre-registration



Cost vs potential



Staffing



Activity hooks



Families



Ethos



Ads

Follow up

