Family Code Night Best Practices

Through a generous grant from the Infosys Foundation USA, the University of Rhode Island’s Graduate School of Library and Information Studies partnered with John Pearce, Executive Director of Family Code Night, Cranston Public Library, Providence Community Libraries, the Central Falls Adams Public Library, and the RI State Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS) to be the first to bring family coding to public libraries in the Ocean State.

Family Code Night at public libraries in Rhode Island launched in December 2018, to a room full of excited third-to-fifth graders and their family members at the Cranston Public Library.

Coding is a critical knowledge skill for children and young adults—and hosting a Family Code Night event for the community at a public library is a fun way to introduce beginning coding concepts and increase computer science literacy. Here our some of our tips and best practices for libraries interested in hosting a Family Code Night.

Start Early & Get Organized
The Family Code Night website has everything your library needs to host a fun and successful event. Sign up for a free event kit for planning and promotional materials, checklists, a presenter script, and more. Start planning early to ensure your Family Code Night is fun for everyone and leaves your audience wondering when they can come back for their next library program!

Generate Excitement
Market, market, market! Utilize the marketing materials in the event kit and reach out to schools, social service organizations, and your dedicated library fan base to spread the word and recruit families to attend your library's event.

Take a look around at your library staff and volunteers: Who could have a successful moonlighting job as a live auctioneer or a stand-up comedian? There’s your presenter! The Family Code Night presenter should be fun, engaging, willing to crack a joke or two, and able to bring lots of enthusiasm to the evening. The Family Code Night event kit includes a presenter script, but the presenter should feel free to run with the energy of the evening, such as quizzing kids on what they've learned or asking for volunteers for quick skill-building demonstrations. If the presenters are excited, the kids are quickly engaged.

Test Your Equipment and Connection—One, Two, Three Times
No one wants to be stuck updating their computer or waiting for the Wi-fi to work when they could be playing games and coding. The event is short and sweet, and with such a limited time frame it’s necessary for all technology to be up and running smoothly from the get-go. Test the equipment and the Internet connection a few
days before, the morning of, and a few hours before the events start. Try to have all computers or tablets on and ready when the families arrive.

Make it Easy
Evening programs can be tricky for families. With long school and workdays, bustling transitions, and homework calling, there is much to compete with for the time and attention of your target audience. Provide snacks and water for the families, and consider putting brain fuel (aka pizza) on the menu if Family Code Night is going to coincide with dinnertime.

Enlist the Help of Teens
Who probably already knows how to code and inspires awe in younger kids? Teenagers! Teenagers make excellent Family Code Night mentors. It’s an opportunity to flex those leadership muscles and maybe earn a few community service hours. Reach out to local computer science teachers to see if they can interest their students in volunteering for the event.

Nudge Parents to Participate
Parent participation is key! Family Code Night is designed to be a team exercise. Adults and kids work in a pairs to solve coding puzzles together, each one taking a turn at the computer or device and learning from one another. Coding mentors should make the rounds during the event and nudge adult-child pairs to remember to switch places with every new puzzle. It can be hard for young children to relinquish their turn on a tablet but they will love the challenge of guiding their parent or guardian through a tricky puzzle, and many adults are excited to code for the first time! Their excitement at the event will translate to interest at home.

Follow up
When the event wraps up, there will be a palpable energy in the air. Families—both children and guardians alike—are going to leave thirsty for more STEAM activities. Make sure you have future programs lined up, and provide plenty of flyers, brochures, and library calendars of events for families to grab on the way out. Family Code Night is an excellent way to build and grow your audience!
Photo caption: A mother and daughter are assisted by a URI Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences student (right) at Family Code Night at the Cranston Public Library. Photo by Ayla Fox.