

FAMILY SPACE DAY: A PLACE WHERE SPACE SCIENCE MEETS FUN! K. Buckaloo¹, S. Shipp², C. Shupla³ and B. Nelson⁴ ¹Lunar and Planetary Institute (3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058), ²Lunar and Planetary Institute (3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058), ³Lunar and Planetary Institute (3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058), ⁴Lunar and Planetary Institute (3600 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, TX 77058).

Introduction: What is Family Space Day?

Family Space Day events engage young children in space science, promotes family learning, and inspires the broader community to explore the wonders of space!

Family Space Day is a monthly three-hour outreach event for families with children ages 5 – 8, initiated by the Lunar and Planetary Institute in 2003. The event is free and occurs on the third Saturday of the month – or in coordination with a celestial event such as a lunar eclipse. Each event actively engages families in a specific space science topic through hands-on activities, crafts, games, coloring, and reading. All activities are designed for parents and children to conduct and experience *together*. Families also are provided resources and activities to extend their exploration at home, and the children always have a take-home component that reminds them of their learning that day.

Our Family Space Day partners include Johnson Space Center's (JSC) Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science education team and the JSC Astronomical Society. Both of these groups share people, resources and content expertise. In addition, the Astronomical Society makes possible two to three community night viewings each year as part of Family Space Day activities. They share their telescopes, knowledge, and enthusiasm, making these night viewings popular events with 250 people in attendance! To date, Family Space Day has engaged the community in 34 different space science topics including astrobiology, galaxies, living and working in space, future Moon exploration, asteroids, and Mars! Each explores what we have learned and what we are hoping to learn through future exploration. We have increased our efforts to advertise this event over the last year and as a result the number of attendees ranges from 75 – 150 people per month.

Why Family Space Days?

Family Space Day was created as a community partnership, based on a need voiced by the community. Parents felt that a large number of opportunities were available for their older children, but that learning experiences for younger children – kindergarteners to third graders - were too rare. Family Space Day is designed for these children. Indeed, an important attribute of Family Space Day is gaining continual parental feedback to ensure that the topics are of interest to the children and presented at an accessible level.

Family Space Day offers a learning environment in which parents and children explore and enjoy learning about space science *together*. Parents often do not have the opportunity to be involved in their children's learning. Some parents may not feel comfortable or confident in guiding learning – especially when science is involved! All activities are designed for parents and children to conduct and experience together, with the parent in the role of learning facilitator. Parents receive short instructional guides for each activity, including background and prompts for questions. They are empowered to guide their children's learning, and to learn together. We have learned over the years that the parents gain a greater understanding of the space science topics as well!

Family Space Day continues at home! The learning doesn't stop at the close of the day because parents use the tools they learned to continue to teach their children at home, using the information, resources, and hands-on activities and craft extensions we provide.

Family Space Day in the Future

We are striving to broaden our advertisement of Family Space Day to local audiences through school flyers, postings at libraries, community centers, and community businesses, and advertisements in local newspapers.

We are working to share all of our resources through the Web. Based on requests from the parents, teachers, home-school educators, and troop leaders attending Family Space Day – and requests from museums and libraries - we are updating our Family Space Day webpage (http://www.lpi.usra.edu/education/space_days/) to include background information, resources, and activity educator guides for the topics that we have explored. Online access will broaden the impact of our efforts by sharing them with other organizations such as libraries, museums, planetariums and astronomy clubs who offer informal space science outreach events to inspire future generations of scientists.

Come visit our display to learn more and to explore the possibility of Family Space Days in your community!