

Family activities to do on a budget

If you've ever taken the kids for a game of ten pin bowling, you're probably not alone if the budget you set yourself was quickly squashed on the back of a second game, pizzas, soft drinks, and various arcade games on the way out because you know the little tykes can't resist trying their luck.

Spending more than what you intended on is a familiar scenario for many people entertaining kids, whether that's at the movies (you swear you're bringing your own Maltesers and drink next time), or sporting events (where you often fork out more on hot chips than you do on the tickets).

While you know taking pre-packed meals, catching different modes of public transport and checking out free events in your local area are all good ways to cut back on spending, there are also a number of inexpensive ways you could have just as much fun at home at the fraction of the cost.

Check out these family activities to do on a budget.

Make a night in as fun as a night out

The one thing a lot of people miss when it comes to a good family night in is that the kids' interests are just as important as your own. That's because your level of engagement will affect theirs, so if you're going to fall asleep watching Frozen for the 67th time, maybe find something else you can do.

Here are some ideas that hopefully everyone in the family can enjoy.

Set up a dinner or dessert station

The wonderful thing about food is most people love it – whether it's a fat juicy steak or some kind of vegetarian meal with quinoa - eating is something the majority of us like doing together.

So, if you want to keep the kids entertained, while helping them learn a new skill and reaping the culinary benefits at the same time, you could:

- Help the kids heat up some pizza bases in the oven and set up a station along the kitchen bench with different sauces, cheeses and healthy toppings, so everyone can make their own
- Help the kids make a giant pancake stack ahead of Saturday night footy (or whatever you're into) – and get them to add food colouring so you can incorporate your team colours
- Help the kids make a barbecue delights metre board with a selection of home-made sausages and rissoles, with a variety of roasted potatoes and veggies to have on the side.

Create your own gold class experience

Line up a selection of healthy snacks, treats and popcorn across the table, and give everyone a cardboard cup so they can make their own munchies mix before the movie starts. Then throw as many pillows on and around the couch as possible, let everyone take their spots and turn the lights down.

Meanwhile, if you're not feeling kids' movies these days, that's ok. Why not slip on a kids' movie that you did like back in the day – The Sandlot, The Labyrinth, The Goonies, The Neverending Story, Mighty Ducks, The Princess Bride. Chances are, your kids will like them too.

Have an outback adventure night

If you're really trying to avoid face painting or dressing up as a princess, jester, or whatever it may be tonight, this one could help to keep everyone entertained for quite some time.

If you've got a tent, pitch it in the backyard for the night and get the kids to help you pack a picnic to have outside as an early dinner. You don't have to drive anywhere, book in, or share amenities.

Meanwhile, if you don't have access to a backyard, make your own lounge room retreat inside out of pillows, blankets and cushions. And, if you can't roast marshmallows over a fire you can definitely add them to a hot chocolate instead.

Host a no-instructions gaming event

No one's giving board games a bad rap, but they aren't for everyone, particularly depending on how well people can read the instructions, follow the rules and remember them.

A multi-player sports or action video game that someone is familiar with may be preferable. And, if you happen to have a mate with an older system, it might also be a chance to dust off some classics, like Die Hard Trilogy on PS1 or the original Mario Kart on Nintendo.

If you do want to do something a little more traditional though, such as trivia or celebrity heads, check out your mobile app store as there are a variety of apps to make game time at home a lot simpler.

Sing us a song, you're the piano man

Something else that may be just as popular as food when you're trying to entertain and ensure everyone has a good time, is music.

You could sit around the table making fruit skewers at the same time as you put a play list of family favourites together, or if you've got a few performers in the midst, you could pour a few red cordials and put on an in-house karaoke night. Buy a strobe light, you're one step away from a dance party.



Final thoughts

A night in definitely has the potential to be just as good as a night out, particularly if you're trying to cut back on costs.

Not only that, you've got more time to relax and enjoy each other's company as you can avoid the traffic, long queues, jacked-up food and beverage prices, and all the impulse buys you may fall victim too as you stroll via shopping malls, stalls and food stands.

In the meantime, hopefully you've picked up a few good ideas for your next night in that you can enjoy as much as the kids.