

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: How many adults are required to supervise the children?

By Stephen Somerville

While this rather delightful summer rolls merely along and while a number of provincial Progressive Conservative cabinet ministers are getting acquainted with their new policy briefing books, a couple of very important, but totally un-related questions, come to mind. To wit:

How many politicians are required at a sod turning ceremony? The answer is: have as many shovels as can be made available.

I have a theory on this: the amount of shovels required at a ceremony is directly proportionally to the proximity to the next election; the closer to said election, the more politicians that need to be part of the photo-op.

Here's a simple way to check this hypothesis out. At the next Aurora sod breaking ceremony, the event organizers should place ten shovels out. Two days later at a similar sized event, the organizers should put out twenty-five shovels. My bet is that, like moths to a flame or hyenas on a felled gazelle, that politicians will magically appear out of the morning midst to lay claim to all the digging instruments.

This rather meandering and overdrawn introduction is a way for me to eventually get to the point of this column. I have written on some very diverse issues over the past twelve years, topics as varied and hopefully compelling as taxes, buying my wife Christmas presents and the proximity of my brother-in-law to our house (answer is too close), but these pale in comparison to the following question: how many adults are required to supervise a children's activities?

As you can imagine, the answer depends on the interplay between a number of factors.

First, consideration must be given to the proximity of the event to one's home. The closer one is to one's home, the more assistance that is required. Going to the Town Park or Machell Park usually required in the past both my wife and I to keep an eye on our son Ryan, whereas one parent seems to manage one child at Canada's Wonderland.

Second, the more expensive the outing, the less supervision required. The reason being that the more money that you have spent, the children are more likely to be enjoying themselves and otherwise occupied.

Third, it depends on the age of the children. The older children are more mobile and can therefore get into more mischief.

Fourth, it depends whether the children are your own. If little Johnny is misbehaving, just leave him at the Town Park or the ACC hockey arena and tell his parents that they boy ran away to join the circus.

Fifth, the time of day. I find that the best time of day to take children anywhere is just before bedtime or when they are very hungry. Children especially like to be taken to museums and opera's ? anywhere where quiet and decorum is required.

Sixth, the importance of the event to the parents, paradoxically enough, seems to bring out the best in kids.

Years ago, I was afforded the opportunity, on behalf of the Newmarket ? Aurora Federal Conservative riding association, of laying a wreath at the Aurora local war memorial. What made it even more special at the time was that my young son Ryan and my two nephews, Brock and Devan, were with me.

Even though it was raining and cold outside, the boys were troopers. Although they did not really understand the true significance of the ceremony they were nonetheless on their best behavior because of the solemnity of the event. I was proud of them.

But why do these same children have no such compunction in making life ?interesting? in the middle of grocery stores or shopping malls?

Years back, I took both my nephews and my son to the grocery store. After a rather lengthy, loud and highly animated four way negotiating session that took place in the middle of isle number sixteen, all three children came home with their own large box of cereal (although there may have been eight or so boxes already at home), a magazine of their choice and either ice cream or a chocolate bar. Me? I came home with a lighter wallet and a migraine headache.

Your friendly scribe has developed a theorem in an attempt to explain this question.

Somerville's Equation goes like this: (km's from home + cost of event + total age of children + importance of event to adults (out of 100)) / number of children. Anything over 450 points and a ratio of only one adult per three children is required.

Let's get back to the posed question - how many adults are required to supervise children's activities? The answer is an easy one.

One woman can, based solely on historical Statistics Canada data, watch over as many as fifteen children. The same statistics reveal that a minimum of two men is required to watch over and ensure the safety of one child.

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