

FROM THE TRENCHES | BY MYRNA SISLEN

# Those Darn Kids

From the first day we opened 13 years ago, we have had a place in the front of the store for younger kids to play instruments. The idea was to have an instrument near the entrance that would be sturdy enough for kids to play and not destroy. Initially we set up a digital drum set. When kids of any age entered the store we would direct them to the drums where they could play to their hearts' content. No one could hear them, and they couldn't hurt anything.



**Creating a kid-friendly space in your store is great for both children and your inventory**

Over the years we added a Schoenhut toy piano and a Woodstock Chimalong. But still, they would often stray and get into the ukuleles and the guitars and everything else. Unfortunately, we all know that we can't rely on parents to control their kids, so that leaves it to us to manage in a respectful way, while trying to protect our inventory.

Even with that, virtually every package containing an instrument in that area would eventually get opened and trashed. Even constant vigilance was not enough to protect the area.

And that is how it has been until about a month ago, when I was talking to a dear friend of mine. She's a doctor, and she was telling me that her office had been having a terrible time with kids in the waiting room getting into everything, including the medical waste buckets. She said she had recently solved the problem by making one of the exam rooms a kids' room with toys and books that they could play with, with or without supervision, and that it worked beautifully. I thought, "Wow, I need to do that, too."

As I said before, my staff and I are continually telling kids, "Don't touch the guitars." "Don't touch the saxophones." "Let us show them to you."

Of course, we already have instruments for kids to play on, like the digital drums.

But when my friend told me about the kids' room, a light bulb went on. Why not make the kids' area we already have into a free zone for kids? We already had the space, bordered by the front window and several rounder displays and

the Hohner Green Tone display. (If you don't have this display, check it out. It is beautiful and really well done. I love ours.)

In any case, we removed all the instruments and child items that were in new packages, which the kids had been destroying anyway, and replaced them with instruments they could play with freely. I put in a ukulele, a quarter-size guitar, Yamaha silent drum set, steel drum, large Chimalong, Schoenhut toy piano, and all the little rhythm instruments I am willing to sacrifice for the cause. Now when kids start to wander dangerously close to the valuable guitars or anything else, instead of having to be the bad guy and say, "Don't touch that!" I say, "Come this way sweetheart, right over here and you can play anything you like." I take them over to the section and turn them loose.

It's working so well we can hardly believe it. We are happy, the parents are happy and the kids are really happy.

For years, every time a shopper with a younger child came into the store I would think, "What are they going to get into now?" Not any more. Thanks to Dr. Lisa Kaufman, I am no longer the bad guy. **MI**

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