

## A Technical Group (TG) on Children's Issues Proposed

By Michael S. Wogalter

An attempt is being made to start a new technical (TG) group on children's issues in HFES. The preliminary scope of focus will be on HFE issues associated with children and their caretakers in various settings such as home, school, and recreation. It has been more than a few decades since a completely new TG has been formed from scratch. The formation of a TG on children's issues (the exact name of the TG is to be determined) was discussed in a topic-related panel session and at the Council of Technical Groups (COTG) at the last annual meeting in Chicago. Discussion by those present was very positive, but there are a few procedures that are needed to initiate the process. One initial requirement is to collect a list of at least 150 persons who would be interested in joining the new TG if it were formed. Half of them can be non-members. If you would be interested in a TG in HFES that focuses on children, would you please email Mike Wogalter at [WogalterM@gmail.com](mailto:WogalterM@gmail.com) with an indication of your willingness to join the TG should it be formed (e.g., "I would be willing to join."), your name and your membership status in HFES. If you know someone who is not an HFES member who might like to join and participate in this TG, would you please suggest it to them and ask them to send a similar indication of interest in an email to Mike Wogalter.

For some background, the rationale and purpose of the proposed TG can be summarized as follows.

Most current HFES TGs concern adult interface-type issues focusing on a content area. One exception is the Individual Differences in Human Performance TG, which focuses on differences among people but mostly between adults. It is debatable whether being a child is an "individual difference"! Another notable TG concerns aging but as currently construed the Aging TG is concerned with older adults. The membership of the Aging TG is probably satisfied with the focus being on older adults. A few other TGs sometimes touch on children's issues such as the Safety TG and Product Design TG but their concern is tangential and occasional.

Thus, none of the current TGs focus on children. Having a core group is important in encouraging interest and research in an area. Children comprise a large proportion of population that could benefit from HF/E input. Indeed, there is a need for greater or special emphasis on children. Why? Young children are particularly vulnerable in many ways, including the potential for injury. Children have different issues and abilities at different ages. Very young children lack both physical and cognitive characteristics to perform in ways that older children can. Twelve year olds can read but a two year old cannot. Development is a continuously changing and dynamic process. A child may be incapable of doing something one day and the next day have that capability. Different children progress at different rates. Furthermore, older children's characteristics can be different than mature adults.

The TG will also concern caretakers. Relevant issues are caretaker's cognitive (e.g., decision-making) characteristics and tasks they perform. For example, issues such as mental and physical workload are relevant.

The lack of a formalized group relating to children makes it less likely that persons interested in the area will find a place to publish their research and ideas. For the HFES annual meeting, proposals are sent to TGs for merit review by peers but without a core group then the proposals get scattered to different TGs in which might not have a single reviewer interested or knowledgeable in children's issues, and the resulting reviewers might not see the research's relevance or importance. Formalization of a specific TG could serve as the beginning of a critical mass serving to energize and generate research and interest in the area. Thus, the proposed TG on children's issues will likely aim to address these issues and probably several others.