



Pack It Light, Wear It Right

# National School Backpack Awareness Day

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

## Event Planning Guide

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**AOTA**<sup>®</sup>

The American  
Occupational Therapy  
Association, Inc.



The Fund To  
**Promote** Awareness of  
**Occupational Therapy**

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# Introduction

National School Backpack Awareness Day events come in many shapes and sizes.

In Andover, Massachusetts, an occupational therapy professor held a backpack weigh-in for 4th and 5th graders and their parents in front of the town hall. The event was promoted by the town's Department of Community Services. In San Francisco, a school-based occupational therapist planned events that took place over several days in the classrooms in which she works. In Shreveport, Louisiana, a student of occupational therapy (and former elementary school teacher) organized a backpack awareness weigh-in at his former school and got class credit for it.

Different people, different resources, different events. All of them enthusiastically educating the public about school backpack use while at the same time raising awareness of occupational therapy.

The following event planner will help you hold your own National School Backpack Awareness Day.

Because people's experiences vary, the planning guide gives a lot of details so that it can serve as a checklist for organizing your event. This guide covers three event models that require various levels of effort: school-wide model (highest level of effort), classroom model (lowest level of effort), and community model (high-to-low level of effort). But there are bound to be as many types of events as there are kinds of people—this event planner is here to help you, not limit you.

Before you decide the type of event to hold in your community, here are certain things to think about:

## **Your time.**

The amount of time and energy the event organizer has to devote to the event defines the scope of the event.

## **Your resources.**

Who can help you and what can they provide? The more pre-existing relationships you can tap, the easier your job will be. In addition, developing “natural” partnerships (organizations whose mission or target market coincides with National School Backpack Awareness Day goals, such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Rotary Club, etc.) expands your reach to more kids and gives you more resources to utilize. Use your imagination: If a bath accessories store in a neighborhood mall is patronized by local parents, maybe the store will lend or donate bathroom scales for the weigh-in. In return, you can display a store poster at the event with a “Thank You” banner across it. Don't be afraid to ask for favors!

## **Your knowledge.**

Comfortable weighing children and their backpacks but not so sure about dealing with all the other details? Ask your state occupational therapy association if they can provide guidance, such as reaching out to some of their contacts in your community or recommending an individual to work in partnership with you on a National School Backpack Awareness Day event.

AOTA provides Listservs and a communication board for connecting electronically with other occupational therapists. A special Listserv has been set up so that you can brainstorm ideas with your colleagues and share successes. To join, go to [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org) and click on “AOTA Listservs” in the left sidebar under “Member Areas.” Follow the instructions to log-on and join the National School Backpack Awareness Day Listserv. An AOTA event advisor will monitor the Listserv to help you troubleshoot problem areas that may arise and smooth the way for successful events.

## Happy planning!

# Fast Facts

## About National School Backpack Awareness Day

### **National Event Date**

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

(Events can be held at other times, too, that work better in your community)

### **Target Audience**

Parents, elementary-school students (through 6th-grade middle school), school administrators and teachers, and other groups interested in the health and well-being of children

### **Location**

Elementary schools or middle schools, departments of community service or recreation, partner facilities (such as after-school clubs, scouts, your town hall), and other educational centers that serve children and parents

### **Suggested Time**

First thing in the morning or right after school to observe full backpacks that children carry between home and school

### **Event Components**

1. Weigh-in of students and their backpacks
2. Media coverage of event with an OT spokesperson

### **Event Coordination Action Items**

1. Permissions
2. Partnerships
3. Coordination
4. Media
5. School Backpack Awareness Day
6. Follow-up

# School-wide event model

(Multiple partners participating)

## 1.

### Permissions

*Get permission from school to hold events and permission for children to participate.*

- Contact school superintendent (county/district) or school principal.**
- Send a letter of request** to hold an event at an elementary school(s) and/or middle school(s) (*a sample letter is provided in this Toolkit*).
- Utilize relationships** you may already have with schools, Board of Education, PTA, or superintendent's office to help pave the way.
- Get permission in writing** to hold the event.
- Ask if there are special requirements** for holding an event for children, and make sure any required forms are filled out and submitted (*sample permission forms are provided in this Toolkit*). Point to emphasize is:
  - The weigh-ins are to educate students, parents, and schools and are for the purpose of emphasizing a public health issue, not for targeting schools for change.
- Make sure school principals, administrators, and teachers are informed** of the event (*a sample Teacher Letter is provided in this Toolkit*).
- Meet principals/administrators ahead of time**, let them know exactly what their roles will be (preferably in writing), and do a walk-through of the event location.

- Provide schools with copies of permission letters** to send home ahead of time for parent signatures so that children can participate in the event (*a sample permission letter is provided in the Toolkit*). Permissions should also include a photo release and media release. Request that letters be sent home well in advance of the event. Students will need to have signed release forms to be able to participate.
- Invite school superintendents** to the event, and if appropriate, pitch superintendent's presence to the media.
- Send thank-you notes** and/or certificates of appreciation after the event.

## 2.

### Partnerships.

*Partner with school of occupational therapy for information collection.*

- Contact the Program Director.**
- Utilize relationships** you already have with the school or faculty members to help pave the way.
- Make your request and be specific:**
  - Number of students needed per school event (for a school-wide event, five students and five weigh-in stations will allow the event to move along smoothly and not require children to wait their turn for too long).
  - Students are needed for approximately 1 1/2 hours (plus travel time and early arrival) on a weekday morning.

- Students compare the child’s backpack weight against the child’s weight, and give this information to each child for educational purposes.
  - Information will be recorded on the following (per student):
    - *Grade* (4th and 5th grade at elementary schools, 6th-grade at middle schools)
    - *Age*
    - *Backpack weight*
    - *Child’s weight*
    - *Percentage of backpack weight to child’s weight*
- Follow up any verbal request** to the program director with a detailed written request.
  - Find out if students will be assigned to participate** or if you need to get volunteers.
    - If assigned, coordinate with designated faculty member.
    - If volunteers, ask the local Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) for assistance or ask the program director to designate an administrative assistant with whom you can coordinate posting notices and collecting names and phone numbers.
  - Designate one student liaison** to work with the event coordinator and be responsible for getting students and the recording forms to the event.
  - Suggest incentives** for students for their participation; for example, offer class credit as a research project or community involvement project (depending on program requirements).
  - Send thank-you notes** and/or certificates of appreciation after the event to the program director as well as to the students.

### 3. Coordination

#### *Coordinate event and participants.*

#### **Event Personnel:**

(These are the categories of people you will need to perform tasks at a school-wide event. The number of people, who performs each job, and who can double up and perform more than one role depends on the size of the event and the event organizer.)

- Event coordinator.** Main point of contact for the school event. Responsible for securing permission from school and overseeing logistics.
- Spokesperson(s).** A designated occupational therapist or state association representative should be available to speak with the media about proper backpack use and the role of OTs in working with children. In addition, a school official—a principal or superintendent—should also be available who can represent the school to the press.
- Weighing coordinators.** Students of occupational therapy or others can perform the weighing process and record information (one for each weigh-in station).
- Media coordinator.** Someone is needed to staff an information table for the media and direct the media to the spokesperson. It’s good continuity if this is the same person who has been speaking with the media about the event.
- Helpers.** School staff members, parent volunteers, or OT volunteers are needed for the following: to supervise children as they go through the 2- to 4-minute weigh-in process (at least one per weigh-in station because children have to line up and wait their turns and might get restless); to hand out the giveaways to children who have participated in the weigh-in; and to help set up and tear down the event area.

### Event Location and Equipment:

- Open area near entrance** of school (outside or inside, accessible to event volunteers and media)
- Bathroom scales** for weighing children and backpacks, one per weigh-in station
- Calculator** for figuring out the percentage of backpack weight to each child's weight
- Occupational therapy association banner** or posted logo/identification
- National School Backpack Awareness Day poster** or banner
- Media table** with press kits and press sign-in sheet
- Table for educational handouts and giveaways**

### Materials Checklist *(see Toolkit for reproducible educational materials):*

- Tip Sheets** for parents, children, and schools (photocopy enough for all participants)
- Press kits** *(see Toolkit for sample materials and suggestions)*
- Information recording forms** *(see Toolkit for reproducible forms)*
- Pens or pencils** for recording information
- Clipboards** for OT students
- Giveaways** for children, one per child *(see Toolkit for artwork that can be photocopied onto sheets of stickers. Other fun giveaways include pens, pencils, erasers, small key chains that can be attached to backpack zippers, or coupons from local establishments for free drinks or food)*
  - Local businesses are often willing to donate giveaways in exchange for mention in your media materials.
- Banner or poster** identifying partners or sponsors of event
- Flyers** to hand out or post around school ahead of time to promote the event

- Camera** for taking pictures of the event—optical or digital (don't forget film/disks and backup batteries!)

## 2.

### Media.

#### *Conduct outreach to media*

(The steps outlined below are designed to elicit optimum media coverage. Depending on organizational resources, you may need to skip some of these steps. Refer to "How to Reach the Media" in the Toolkit for more details.)

- Prepare a list of print and broadcast reporters** in your area.
- Designate and schedule** a local occupational therapy spokesperson(s).
- Provide spokespersons** with National School Backpack Awareness Day materials and the messages that he or she should put forward during interviews. These encompass:
  - Backpack do's and don'ts
  - School ergonomics
  - The role of occupational therapists in the promotion of health and wellness among children
- Prepare press materials**
- Send out a media advisory** about the issue of backpacks and school ergonomics.
- Telephone reporters** and pitch advance articles/interviews and day-of-event coverage.
- Send out a press release** to the metro news editor the week of the event to get the event scheduled on the "daybook" (the daily schedule of news to cover).
- Pitch to the media** by telephone asking them to cover the event.

## 5.

# National School Backpack Awareness Day

## *Conduct event*

(Suggested time span: One hour in the morning, beginning one-half hour before school starts and ending one-half hour after school starts)

### **Pre-event:**

- Schedule personnel** to arrive early.
- Set up weigh-in stations** (see “*Event Location and Equipment*” above).
- Set up press table** at the front of the location and somewhat away from the lines of children. Have press materials and a sign-in sheet available.
- Designate a press area** for holding spokesperson interviews in relative quiet.
- Decorate location** with banners and posters, and any other decorations you want to use.

### **Weigh-in procedure:**

- Per weigh-in station:**
  - One OT student to collect and record data
  - One bathroom scale with large enough base to weigh backpacks
  - Drop box
  - Pencils or pens
  - Precut slips of paper with spaces to write in grade, age, backpack weight, and student’s weight (see *Toolkit for collection form*)
- Lines form** at each scale
- Child places backpack on scale**
- OT student fills out spaces** on information collection slip of paper: “Grade,” “Age,” and “Backpack Weight.”

- OT student hands child the paper** and a pencil and removes backpack from scale.
- Child weighs self**, fills in the “child’s weight” blank. (OT students may record information if children don’t mind.)
- Help child calculate** the percentage of his/her backpack weight to his/her body weight.
- Child takes a giveaway and a Tip Sheet for Parents and Children** to take home. (Children from all lines can be channeled to one giveaway table *or* giveaways and Tip Sheets may be placed near each weigh-in station).
- Volunteers keep the lines moving**, maintain an atmosphere of fun, discourage unruliness, and encourage children who have completed the procedure to get to class.
- Students with disabilities**, such as those who use wheelchairs or those who use crutches and leg braces, should be encouraged to participate in the weigh-in in whatever way possible and be assisted by school staff volunteers or occupational therapists at the event.

### **Post-event:**

- Volunteers** tear down and clean up event area.
- Event coordinator** meets briefly with school principal/administrator to make sure there are no issues to be addressed.
- Event coordinator** or media coordinator stays at school and accompanies media representatives until all have left the location.

## 6.

### Follow-up

- Follow-up with media** (some reporters who didn't cover the event may still be interested in stories or interviews about backpacks and school ergonomics).
- Report on success of event to AOTA** (see "After September 19" on page 16). Include:
  - Copies of local media placement (print clippings and, if possible, audio/video clips)
  - Partnerships formed to produce the event
  - No more than two photos of the event, print or digital (Note: To be able to reproduce the photos in *OT Practice* or in other articles about events, digital photos should be 300 dpi; prints should be 4" x 6")
  - Lessons learned that would benefit other OT organizations (relevant to expanding next year's National School Backpack Awareness Day)

*AOTA is setting aside an area on the Web site for National School Backpack Awareness Day events. See "After the Event" on page 16.*

### **Anticipated Results from Events**

- Media placements that include one or more of the following per story: coverage of events, backpack issue-based information, identification of an occupational therapist spokesperson with quotes and/or explanation of occupational therapy, and mention of occupational therapy's relationship to the health and well-being of children

# Classroom model

(Single OT coordinator)

## 1.

### Permissions

- Put a request in writing** to the principal to hold an event at the school (a sample letter is provided in this Toolkit).
- Get permission in writing** to hold the event.
- Ask if there are special requirements** for holding an event for children, and make sure any required forms are filled out and submitted (*sample permission forms are provided in this Toolkit*). Point to emphasize is:
  - The weigh-ins are to educate students, parents, and schools and are for the purpose of emphasizing a public health issue, not for targeting schools for change.
- Provide students with copies of permission letters** to send home ahead of time for parent signatures so that children can participate in the event (*a sample permission letter is provided in the Toolkit*). Permissions also should include a photo release so you can take pictures and a media release if you are inviting reporters to the classroom. Collect signed permission letters before the event.
- Invite the principal and parents** to the event.

## 2.

### Coordination

**Event Equipment and Materials** (*see Toolkit for reproducible educational materials*)

- Bathroom scale(s)** for weighing children and backpacks
- Calculator** for figuring out the percentage of backpack weight to each child's weight
- National School Backpack Awareness Day poster** or banner
- Room decorations** such as posters, pictures of backpacks, balloons, etc.
- Tabletop** for educational handouts and giveaways
- Tip Sheets** for parents, children, and school (photocopy enough for all participants)
- Press kits** if you have invited the media (*see Toolkit for materials and suggestions*)
- Information recording forms** (*see Toolkit for reproducible forms*)
- Pens or pencils** for recording information
- Giveaways for children**, one per child (*See Toolkit for artwork that can be photocopied onto sheets of stickers*). Other fun giveaways include pens, pencils, erasers, key chains that can be attached to backpack zippers, or coupons from local establishments for free drinks or food.)
- Camera** for taking pictures of the event, optical or digital (don't forget to bring film/disks and backup batteries!)

### 3. Media

If you are conducting a classroom event and want to invite media, you may want to contact one reporter with whom the school has a relationship. A reporter with a still photographer, or alternately one video camera, won't be overwhelming in a one-room setting. Please see "How to Reach the Media" in this Toolkit for other suggestions.

### 4. National School Backpack Awareness Day

#### Pre-event:

- Set up weigh-in station.**
- Decorate room.**

#### Weigh-in procedure:

- Form a line** at the scale/each scale.
- Child places backpack on scale.**
- OT fills out spaces** on information collection paper: "Grade," "Age," and "Backpack Weight."
- OT hands child the paper** and a pencil and removes backpack from scale.
- Child weighs self**, fills in the "child's weight" blank. (OT may record information if children don't mind).
- Help child calculate** the percentage of his/her backpack weight to his/her body weight.
- Child takes a giveaway** and a Tip Sheet for Parents and Children to take home.
- Students with disabilities**, such as those who use wheelchairs or those who use crutches and

leg braces, should be encouraged to participate in the weigh-in in whatever way possible and be assisted by their teachers or the occupational therapist at the event.

#### Post-event:

- Clean up event area.**
- Meet with school principal/administrator** to make sure there are no issues to be addressed.
- Accompany media representatives** until all have left the location.

### 5. Follow-up

- Follow-up with media** to see when the story will run (some reporters who weren't invited to cover the event may still be interested in stories or interviews about backpacks and school ergonomics).
- Send thank-you notes** or certificates of appreciation to the principal, the classroom teacher(s), and parent volunteers.
- Report on success of event** to AOTA (*see Toolkit for reporting form*). Include:
  - Copies of local media placement (print clippings and, if possible, audio/video clips)
  - Partnerships formed to produce the event (school role and level of cooperation)
  - No more than two photos of the event, print or digital (*Note: To be able to reproduce the photos in OT Practice or in other articles about events, digital photos should be 300 dpi; prints should be 4" x 6"*)
  - Lessons learned that would benefit other OT organizations (relevant to next year's anticipated National School Backpack Awareness Day)

*AOTA is setting aside an area on the Web site for National School Backpack Awareness Day events. See "After the Event" on page 16.*

**Anticipated Results from Event**

- Media placement(s) that includes one or more of the following per story: coverage of event, backpack issue-based information, identification of an occupational therapist spokesperson with quotes and/or explanation of occupational therapy, and mention of occupational therapy's relationship to the health and well-being of children

# Community model

(Non-school event—may be single OT coordinator or partnership)

**This model** involves community facilities where the event is promoted to parents who will need to transport and accompany their children. The event may be held in community-owned or privately owned facilities (for example, a town hall, a church, or a synagogue). National School Backpack Awareness can be held independently (a special one-day event on September 17), tailored to fit in with existing health education classes or activities, or made a part of children's activities (such as a Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts troop meeting). Departments of Community Activities or city recreation departments often have specific requirements for working with children that may require use of their forms, background checks of event coordinators, or other special permissions with which you will need to comply.

## 1.

### Permissions

- Put a request in writing** to the organization to hold an event at their facility or during one of their classes or meetings (*a sample letter is provided in this Toolkit*)
- Get permission in writing** to hold the event
- Ask if there are special requirements** for holding an event for children, and make sure any required forms are filled out and submitted (*sample permission forms are provided in this Toolkit*). Point to emphasize is:
  - The weigh-ins are to educate students, parents, and schools and are for the purpose of emphasizing a public health issue, not for targeting schools for change.
- Provide parents with copies of permission letters** to sign at the time of the event so children can participate in the event (*a sample permission letter is provided in the Toolkit*). Permissions also should include a photo release if you are going to take pictures and a media release if you are inviting the media to the event. Make sure to collect signed letters for all participants.

## 2.

### Partnerships

- Work with the organization** providing the setting for your event to figure out how to mutually present both your messages in the best light. The goals for National School Backpack Awareness Day are to promote the health and well-being of children *and* increase awareness of occupational therapists in the lives of children. Diplomatically work with your partner to ensure that all goals are promoted equally.
- Tap into communication vehicles to promote the event** (organizational Web sites or newsletters, facility bulletin boards, published community calendars, weekly community newspapers or circulars, etc.).
- Tap into your partner's media contacts to promote the event** and make sure the reporters receive occupational therapy-related information (*see Toolkit for sample press materials*).
- Invite a local VIP connected with the facility or organization** (mayor, council member) to the event.

- Invite a local occupational therapy VIP if you are uncomfortable serving as a media spokesperson** (state association president, program director from a school of occupational therapy, or an OT with knowledge of school ergonomics who has media experience).

### 3. Coordination

Events at facilities other than schools may be on a large or small scale. Please refer to the other two models in this Event Planner for the coordination details that best fit your event.

#### **Event Personnel:**

- Event coordinator**
- Spokesperson(s)** (*if media is invited*)
- Information collectors** for weighing children and their backpacks and making sure the correct information is required
- Media coordinator** to staff a sign-in table for the media and direct them to the spokesperson (if this is a large event, the event has been pitched to the media, and a number of reporters are expected)
- Parent volunteers** to supervise children as they go through the 2- to 4-minute weigh-in process (at least one per weigh-in station because of children having to line up and wait their turns); hand out the giveaways to children who have participated in the weigh-in; and help set up and tear down the event area.

#### **Event Equipment and Materials** (*see Toolkit for reproducible educational materials*):

- Bathroom scale(s)** for weighing children and backpacks
- Calculator** for figuring out the percentage of backpack weight to each child's weight
- National School Backpack Awareness Day poster** or banner

- Event decorations** such as posters, banners acknowledging partners and sponsors, pictures of backpacks, balloons, etc.
- Table(s)** for educational handouts and giveaways, and for media materials
- Tip Sheets** for parents, children, and school (photocopy enough for all participants)
- Press kits** if you have invited the media (*see Toolkit for materials and suggestions*)
- Information recording forms** (*see Toolkit for reproducible forms*)
- Pens or pencils** for recording information
- Giveaways** for children, one per child (*See Toolkit for artwork that can be photocopied onto sheets of stickers*). Other fun giveaways include pens, pencils, erasers, key chains that can be attached to backpack zippers, or coupons for free drinks or food
  - Local businesses are often willing to donate giveaways in exchange for mention in your media materials.
- Camera** for taking pictures of the event, optical or digital (don't forget to bring film/disks and backup batteries!)

### 4. National School Backpack Awareness Day

#### **Pre-event:**

- Decorate event area.**
- Set up the weigh-in station(s).**
- Set up giveaways** and educational materials on a tabletop for easy handout.
- Set up a media table** with press kits and a sign-in sheet (if multiple reporters are expected).

#### **Weigh-in procedure:**

- Form a line** at the scale/each scale.
- Child places backpack on scale.**

- OT fills out spaces** on information collection paper: “Grade,” “Age,” and “Backpack Weight.”
- OT hands child the paper** and a pencil and removes backpack from scale.
- Child weighs self**, fills in the “child’s weight” blank. (OT students may record information if children don’t mind.)
- Help child calculate** the percentage of his/her backpack weight to his/her body weight.
- Child takes a giveaway and a Tip Sheet for Parents and Children** to take home
- Children with disabilities**, such as those who use wheelchairs or those who use crutches and leg braces, should be encouraged to participate in the weigh-in in whatever way possible and be assisted by their teachers or the occupational therapist at the event.

**Post-event:**

- Clean up event area.**
- Meet with facility administrator** to make sure there are no issues to be addressed.
- Accompany media representatives** until all have left the location.

## 5. Follow-up

- Follow-up with media** to see when the story will run (some reporters who weren’t invited to cover the event may still be interested in stories or interviews about backpacks and school ergonomics).
- Send thank-you notes** or certificates of appreciation to your facility sponsor, spokespersons, parent volunteers, and any other partners who helped make the event possible.

- Report on success of event** to AOTA (*see Toolkit for reporting form*). Include:
  - Copies of local media placement (print clippings and, if possible, audio/video clips)
  - Partnerships formed to produce the event (school role and level of cooperation)
  - Photos of the event, print or digital (*Note: To be able to reproduce the photos in OT Practice or in other articles about events, digital photos should be 300 dpi; prints should be 4" x 6"*)
  - Lessons learned that would benefit other OT organizations (relevant to next year’s anticipated National School Backpack Awareness Day)

*AOTA is setting aside an area on the Web site for National School Backpack Awareness Day events. See “After the Event” on page 16.*

- Anticipated Results from Event**
  - Media placement(s) that includes one or more of the following per story: coverage of event, backpack issue-based information, identification of an occupational therapist spokesperson with quotes and/or explanation of occupational therapy, and mention of occupational therapy’s relationship to the health and well-being of children

# After the Event

## AOTA and The Fund To Promote Awareness of Occupational Therapy National School Backpack Awareness Day Post-Events on the Web Site

The National School Backpack Awareness Day page of the AOTA Web site will be updated to list communities where events were held and post stories and photographs from the events.

So *please* take the time to write a brief story about your event, and send pictures!

### **Things to consider when deciding what to include in your event write-up:**

#### **WHO**

Who was the initiator and/or organizer of the event? Don't be shy about giving yourself a pat on the back! Who partnered with you? Who volunteered? Who came from the media? How many children participated?

#### **WHAT**

What happened at the event? What did the event look like? What did the children learn? Did you hear a particularly funny or clever quote from one of the children that you can share? What did OT/OTA students learn from the activity? What about the adult participants? What media coverage did you get? What choices did you make about components of the event that you would recommend to your colleagues?

#### **WHEN**

What day and hour did you hold your event? Was this a good choice, and why?

#### **WHERE**

Where was the event (city, state, venue)? Did things go smoothly at that location? Why or why not?

#### **HOW**

How did your event turn out? Who were your partners and how did working with them make your event better than it would have been otherwise? How did you handle a potentially sticky problem so that everything was successful? How would you do things differently next year?

#### **WHY**

Why did you want to organize an event? Why do you think people participated? Why was your event successful (not successful)? What surprised you about the event? What did you experience that you hadn't expected?

*Send stories and no more than two photos via e-mail or regular mail to:*

**AOTA, 4720 Montgomery Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814-3425**

**praota@aota.org**

**Thank you!**

We appreciate your support of and participation in National School Backpack Awareness Day!

