



Happy Birthday! A child's party without the stress!

Few things are as much fun as the smiling face of a child enjoying a birthday party, with a pile of presents ready to be ripped open. Maybe that's why birthday parties have been getting more extravagant, with more and more of them taking place outside the home and costing more than parents can afford. The good news for parents is that kids don't need big, expensive parties to have lots of fun.

For working parents, finding time to plan a birthday party can be stressful. So, let's stop for a minute, take a deep breath, and read some helpful hints for planning your child's birthday party.

Talk to your child

Young children will be confused by too many choices, but if you ask about other parties your child has attended, that can help you figure out what will be fun. Be sure to find out what they liked about the party and what they didn't like.

It's often best to keep it simple. A picnic in the park, Pin The Tail on the Donkey in your house, playing with Play-Doh, or making paper hats or a craft project can be just as much fun as an expensive party at a rock-climbing gym, bowling alley, or Chuck E. Cheese.

Other parents may ask what your child would like for a gift. If parents are thoughtful enough to ask, it's great if you can give them some guidance. Ask your child and make a list together. Put stars next to the things he or she wants most. Help your child understand that they won't get everything on the list, and that some choices may be too expensive or unlikely for other reasons, so they won't be disappointed.

Calculate your budget

Create a party budget for the entire event, including such items as invitations, food, party decorations, goody bags, and any other costs. Estimate the number of guests and the cost for each guest to help determine your options.

Be sure to include the cost of your gifts in your budget. And do not feel guilty if you can't buy everything your child wants. Part of our job as parents is to teach our children about setting priorities and helping them understand that there are lots of ways to express love – not just with material things.

Pick a good time for a party

Set a time that best suits your child. You want to work around nap times for the four-and-under set and keep the party short, usually one to two hours. Children that age can get cranky if the party is too long. In general, the best times for young children are late morning



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Birthday Party Tips

Be Flexible!

It is perfectly normal for young children to have more fun with the gift-wrap than the gift, the frosting than the cake, and some toys more than others. Let your child enjoy the birthday party his or her way, and recognize that not everything goes according to plan.

Remember that some children simply need time to adjust to the novelty and excitement of a birthday party. And some children may prefer to watch the fun -- and they can enjoy the party just as much! Don't force guests to participate, but help them feel they are part of the fun.

Be Very Flexible!

Remember that young children have a short attention span and may get easily distracted.

And, if the birthday child falls asleep during the party, let him or her sleep. Some children shut down if there's too much excitement. Just keep an eye on them while entertaining the rest of the party guests.

We Meant Really Flexible!

Since the goal is to have fun, don't feel badly if there isn't enough time to do all the activities that you planned. The kids may decide to run around acting silly instead of a scheduled activity. Eating, a game, or a crafts project may make take twice as long as you expected. If the children don't eat the food you've prepared, they won't starve. If a child wants to go home and the parent says it's OK, don't worry about it -- just let them.

(after the morning nap) or late afternoon (following the afternoon nap). Be sure to include the parents as guests, so they can help their own children participate in the birthday fun.

For school-age kids, it's usually best to have a party on the weekend, most likely in the late morning or afternoon.

A weekend birthday party is usually more convenient for the adults who will attend or will bring the children to and from the party. Be sure to ask for help from a babysitter, grandparent, or friend so that you can participate in the party activities and share the fun with your child.



Bigger parties are almost never better. Simple parties can be more fun than expensive ones. Try having a party at home with a few good friends.

How many guests?

Bigger parties are almost never better. A good guideline for children under 12 is one guest per each year of your child's age, plus one extra guest.

Party time

Children under three often find it hard to handle the extra excitement and attention at birthday parties. To help keep your child calm and relaxed, plan to give him or her a nap or rest period before and after the party. In addition, allow for some "time off" during the birthday party, such as asking your child to spend a few quiet minutes with you alone while you get the cake or goody bags.

Always be prepared for meltdowns. If your child cries or gets upset during the birthday party, take him or her to another room to provide a break from the noise and activity. Then give your child something specific (and easy) to do. That will help relieve tension, distract from whatever caused the meltdown, and help your child feel more in control.

Wrap-up

Now that the party is over, you can sit down and relax with your child. Take the time to talk to your child about the party -- the special and funny moments, being with friends, and feeling grateful for the party and the gifts. This is not the time to criticize. What is most important: take this time to let your child know how this special day marks the moment they entered your life and brought you so much joy and love -- the greatest gift of all.



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