

# PLANNING A GREAT BIRTHDAY PARTY



The key to a successful birthday party is in the planning. Here you will find tips and pitfalls of party planning and ideas to help make the event fun for the kids and stress-free for you.

There are two big factors to consider before you start planning. The first factor is your child. What is your child's age and temperament? Are they active? Do they like to be around a lot of people and engage in physical activities or are they more quiet and shy? Are they comfortable sharing their toys? Is losing in a relay race a problem? You can avoid a lot of tears during the party when you talk with your child about who will be at the party and what they can expect to happen.

Another big factor is you. Do you love planning all of the details and organizing the children at the party or would you rather leave it to the professionals? Would you prefer to have adults present to socialize or would you rather the focus be solely on your child? You might want to consider whether you have other activities that week or day to prevent you from spending a lot of time setting up activities and games. There is, of course, no right answer to these questions. It can just help you decide the who, what, and where of the party without totally stressing you out.

## GUEST LIST AND SPACE

For some, it is best to start planning 2 or 3 months in advance. For others, 3 or 4 weeks is plenty. Some factors to consider are whether you are considering renting a space, hiring a performer, having out of town guests, or it is during a busy time of year. Once you decide upon a date and a guest list, you can decide whether you prefer the comfort of your own home or the convenience of a rented space. When you create your guest list, be sure to include any siblings or adults that will be attending. Make sure that if you plan to be outside, you also have an alternate indoor plan. Rain happens.

## ENTERTAINMENT

If you think you would like to have a performer to entertain at your party, there are some good questions to ask to determine if they are right for your child and your party. Is it age appropriate? Will the children be seated for a performance? Is it interactive? How long will they be there? How long have they been in business or where else do they perform? Don't be afraid to ask questions! Performers are generally busiest on the weekends and even more so in the summer. Call early for best availability.

## **ACTIVITIES**

Although most 2 year olds (and younger) are best without a structured birthday party, children older than two often do best when there are planned activities. For preschoolers, let them choose between activities as simple as a craft table, a Lego area, and a dress up station or as elaborate as a ten station carnival. At this age, any game should be a cooperative game with no winners and losers or where everyone wins. Older children often enjoy more challenging games where competition adds to the excitement. 10-12 year olds are excited about learning a new skill like drumming, spinning a basketball, or making a balloon animal. There are great resources on the web and in the library with hundreds of games and activities for the kids.

## **FOOD**

When it comes to food for a birthday party, simple is the key. Kids tend not to eat much of the real food that is served (especially if there are snacks available). Pizza, hot dogs, chicken nuggets, or mac and cheese are the standards for a reason. Kids will eat them and they are easy to prepare and serve. If adults are going to be staying for the party, you can choose to keep it simple and serve the same fare, get platters made up, or go all out and get it catered. You might want to avoid having a meal that requires a lot of attention if you are also running Pin the Tail on the Donkey and all of the other activities. 2 words of advice: little orange fingers are inevitable after eating cheese curls and sugar makes kids hyper. Enough said.

## **PARTY FAVORS**

Party favors are a great way to end the party to say thanks for coming. But, you can also incorporate them into a game or activity. You might have a treasure hunt and the goodie bag or other small gift could be the prize. An activity older kids would enjoy is learning to juggle and give the juggling balls as a favor. For a beach theme, give a bucket, shovel, and a pair of sunglasses. It's ok to think outside the bag.

## **GET READY**

You've spent a lot of time planning for the big event and now it's time to make sure you have everything in place. Ask your spouse, another parent, or even an outgoing babysitter to help you during the party. The younger the children, the more help you'll need. It will also give you a chance to socialize a bit yourself. The kids shouldn't have all the fun. Make sure that you have everything ready before the kids arrive; camera, video camera, film, batteries, candles, matches, knife, and cash or check ready for food or entertainment. Nothing is more frustrating than having a table full of children salivating over the cake and you swear that the matches are somewhere in that catch-all drawer. A few extra minutes of preparation before the party will pay big rewards during the sometimes hectic pace of a party.

Anticipate that problems could arise with your child or another party guest. Having a quiet space available with a toy or book could diffuse any anxiety or difficulty. After a minute or two, children are usually ready to join in the festivities again. Don't worry if the party isn't on schedule exactly as planned. If the kids are having fun, go with it!

Having a great birthday party begins with good planning. In the end, you can look back with a great feeling of accomplishment. You have created a memory your child won't forget.