

Successful Birthday Parties for Kids



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Introduction

All parents want to hear their child say “that was the best birthday party ever!” and brag about it to their friends. To hear other children say that your child's birthday parties are the greatest is a wonderful feeling. But does this mean that you have to spend a ton of money to achieve this fame? No, not at all! You would be surprised how little you have to spend out to put on a fantastic birthday party, leaving your child and your wallet, happy.

Chapter 1

Birthday Party Checklist

Whichever way you look at it, parties require work. This work does not need to be overwhelming, troublesome, or frustrating if you use just a few organization skills. By using a birthday party checklist, you can save your extra energy for the party where you will need it!

Here are some basic things to keep in mind when planning for the perfect birthday party:

- Allow a good solid four to five weeks for planning
- Follow the time line given in the checklist. This will help you stay on track and ensure you do not forget even the smallest detail.
- Choose early what types of foods or snacks you intend on serving. Make a list of all the ingredients you will need and attach it to your checklist.
- Decide on the type of cake and if you are making it or purchasing one. If making the cake yourself, make sure to add the needed ingredients on your party food shopping list. If ordering a custom cake, make sure you check with the bakery how soon the order needs to be in to ensure that you receive the cake on time!
- If ordering party favors or gifts online, allow ample time for them to arrive prior to the party.
- Have help enlisted early on and back ups in case someone has to back out for any reason.
- Typical party times are 1pm to 3pm or 2pm to 4pm unless you are feeling energetic and are okay to go for the 1pm to 4pm time slot. For toddlers and under, the ideal party time is 10am to around 11.30am. Granted, there are those occasions where if you are renting a facility or using a sporting event, movie, or some other off site activity for the backdrop of the party, you will be bound to times that are available to you. This can have its advantages and disadvantages but can still be workable.

Chapter 2 Tips for Success

Getting a group of children together for a birthday party, regardless of age, takes a lot of thought, consideration and time. Some people have a knack for party giving and seem to take it in their stride. Others however, barely escape by the skin of their teeth. Mastering the skill of organization and having nerves of steel will allow you to tackle any size birthday party, regardless of the children's ages. Here are some tips that will help your next birthday party go without a hitch.

Planning the Big Day

Unless you are planning a surprise party for your child, you should always involve them in the party planning and preparation stages. This gives them ownership of the party and allows them to get excited, making it that much more of a memorable event. The anticipation for the big day will keep them interested and involved, helping to make sure that everything that needs to be done is completed.

Obviously if your child is still a toddler, their help in preparing for the big day should be made to be age appropriate. Allow your child input on theme, location, menu, games, guest list and decorations. All ages of children can help fill party favor bags and older children can help write invitations and decorate.

The Guest List

For younger children, it is easier to compile a list of a few close friends and their children or a few children from your child's daycare. Older children could invite their friends from school and friends they have from after school activities.

You will need to ask yourself just how many screaming, laughing, loud and rowdy children you can handle at one time, so it's best to let your child know just how many friends they are allowed to invite and make sure that you keep to that number. A good idea is to give your child the least amount of kids you can handle

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comfortably. So if your maximum is 10, offer your child 5 guests. If the number does go up to ten for example, you are still within your limitation range, yet they feel like they made the final call.

You must also bear in mind the ages of the children being invited as well and how much help you will have when setting your personal limitations. Will adults accompany them or will you be on your own. If the birthday party is for a toddler, specify that an adult must remain with the child at the party. This saves you from having to be disciplinarian to a child who may be less than accommodating. A good rule of thumb with toddlers is to take their age and just add one and invite no more guests than that. So for example, if the children you are inviting are 3 years old, don't invite more than 4 children. The average party guest list is around eight children for children over the age of six, so do not feel like you are shortchanging your child by not having more.

Keep in mind where the party will take place such as in the home, yard, roller or ice skating rink, park, recreation center, public beach or swimming pool, laser tag or paint ball facility, sporting event, convention center, or a hotel. Some of these locations can be very expensive so you may want to consider the cost per guest depending on the location.

Setting a Time Limit

Unless you want to hold an all day birthday party, you will need to set a time limit for the big day. How long do you want the party to go on for? Toddler parties are easy to put a time limit on as toddlers tire quickly for the most part and other parents may have their child on a strict routine. So generally two or three hours is ample time for a toddlers birthday. Kindergarten to third grade can vary a little more, depending on each individual child. However, no more than 3 or 4 hours is needed to celebrate in a big way.

You need to know your limitations and stick to them. Older children will probably love the idea of having their party go on all day and night so this is where you

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have to draw the line and make sure that they know their party will end at around 7 or 8pm at the latest.

Choosing Your Theme

Choosing a theme for your toddler can be extremely easy as most toddlers take a special liking to something. If they have yet to show any real interest in anything in particular, you can suggest something to them which will in all likelihood be accepted. Discuss party themes with your toddler to get and give ideas and to allow your toddler to be more involved. Write down any ideas that you or your toddler have on a piece of paper or in a note-book. Once you get the basics written down, take a look at each individual theme and pick out the top three themes.

It is best to base your decision on your budget as well as your child's enthusiasm. Against each theme, write down what supplies you will need as well as the location and see if there is anything that cannot be accommodated. If all of them are within your budget and capability, you can give your child one of two options. They can either pick their favorite out of the three or you can throw them in a hat and let them pick that way.

Once the decision is made, it needs to be final so make sure you are capable of pulling off any of the three given choices.

Fun and Games

Keep the children happy and active by having plenty of games for them to participate in and remember to keep the downtime to a minimum. Summer birthdays are great for outdoor birthday parties to keep children actively involved and perhaps a paddling pool can be used for the younger ones. During the Winter a sledding party or an ice-skating party with hot cocoa is a great idea. There are also many games that can be played indoors that do not require much preparation and regardless of the time of year for the party, you should always have several backup games for the children to play.

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Make sure to have enough party game gifts so that no matter if a guest wins or loses they will still receive a gift. No one likes to lose and after all, it is a party and you want everyone to enjoy it and be happy.

Have a Back-Up Plan

You should always have a back-up plan just in case the weather does not permit the intended party plan. Have an alternate location picked out in advance if your home will not accommodate all of your guests at one time should the party be rained on or other situations arise.

Make sure too that food is mobile. Do your best to readjust the party to a new environment in a relaxed manner. Getting uptight will be picked up on fast and younger guests will react accordingly which is never pleasant! As long as you appear to be having a great time, your guests will too.

Ground Rules

Set your ground rules way in advance with regard to sleepovers. If the party was not intended to be a sleepover let your child know that once the party is over, it is over unless you agree in advance for a guest or two to remain through the night. You will be exhausted by the end of the party so again this is a great time to know your limitations. If the party's theme is a sleepover, then set your ground rules first when making the party plans with your child.

Try to steer away from sleepovers for children under the age of ten unless you already know the children well. This will save you from middle of the night wake ups by children who are not yet experienced in spending the night at someone else's home and having to return them or call a parent to pick them up.

Pinatas

The famous Piñata that children of all ages adore so much comes with their own special set of rules to live by. Piñatas are great for a variety of parties and can be filled with practically anything, which makes them great for all age groups. With

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younger children, piñatas can become frustrating when they do not have the strength to break it. Check to see if your piñata comes with an escape trap operated by a pull string. Children can take turns pulling on the string until one frees the trap and the candy or toys come raining down.

Regardless of the age of your party guests, make sure the piñata is big enough to hold enough candy to go around as you do not want anyone feeling left out. If there are some shy children in the crowd, have some leftover candy used to stuff the piñata set aside to give them their own separate bag. Make sure you hang your piñata in a sturdy location and away from anything that could be broken by a missed swing. It is more fun to watch when the children are blind folded swinging aimlessly at the piñata. The children's laughter is priceless.

Spin the blind folded child around a few times and then let them have at it. Set the amount of swings allowed in each turn. Start with the smaller children first, working up in age and size as turn allows. Most importantly, keep the other children back when one is up to bat!

Ask for Help

Do not be afraid to ask for help – you will need it! You cannot be in more than one place at any one time and when it comes to the point of preparing the food, cutting the cake, serving ice cream etc, you will want to have someone who will keep the games going until it is time to settle down to eat. Consider asking friends, relatives or another child's parent or even perhaps a favorite babysitter or an older sibling to help.

Generally, you will find that most parents of your guests will be more than happy to lend a helping hand, especially if you offer to return the favor. Do not be afraid to delegate some of the responsibilities. Tending to a flock of demanding children and still trying to keep the flow going can be rough no matter how much kryptonite you have under your belt.

Make a List

Use a list and check it to make sure that you haven't missed anything. Forgetting something can easily break the party and unbelievably yet true, there have been more occasions than you could imagine where the host has forgotten to pick up the birthday cake or in the mix of all the planning, did not stop long enough to buy a gift for their birthday child. Your list could save the day!

Keeping Memories

Make sure you have your camera ready and at your disposal at all times. Try to capture as many pictures as possible and have other adults that are helping you also have a camera available as well to aid in catching shots when you are unable. Another great idea depending on the children's age is to supply them each with a disposable camera at the beginning of the party. Allow them to take pictures of their friends and what they see as special picture moments.

Social Skills

Birthday parties are a great time to teach your child appreciation and great social skills. Discuss with your child prior to the party and remind them on the day to make sure to thank their guests for coming and if gifts were brought, to thank them for the gifts as well. A few days after the party, depending on the child's age, sit with them and help them fill out thank you cards to the guests for coming and for the gifts. This can even be done on a computer. This is also a great time to use some of those party pictures you snapped throughout the party to make the thank you notes even that much more special.

Memorialize the Event

A picture may speak a thousand words but a picture story says so much more. There are numerous programs available that allow you to make picture stories out of your pictures. You can add captions, voice inserts, and even music backgrounds into these nifty programs and they are easier to use than you think.

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You do not need to be a computer geek to make a memorialized picture story disc of your child's birthday party.

This also makes a great keepsake treasure that your child would have for life and pass down to their children. Think how great it would be if *your* special days had been captured on disc and *your* parents had taken the time to add captions, voice inserts, or even popular music backgrounds of the time, and you was able to view them as an adult. It would make for a great family tradition and something your child will treasure dearly as an adult.

If that is still a bit too high tech, you could make a scrapbook instead incorporating pictures from the birthday party. Adding the preparation list, theme cards made to decide what kind of party to have, pieces of the wrapping paper and ribbons the gifts were adorned with, and adding your own personal notations as to what foods were served, games played, and guests in attendance would make the scrapbook even more special. You could also add particular quirks your child had at that age, favorites and dislikes, accidents, bumps, bruises etc, much like you would in a baby journal.

Chapter 3

Birthday Party Invitations

Once you have your guest list, you need to start making out invitations. You can purchase invitations online, make them or buy them from a card shop or discount store. There are many websites that allow you to create your own birthday party invitations online for free. Do an Internet Google search for 'free printable birthday invitations' and you will have hundreds of possibilities at your fingertips. The great thing about creating your own is that you can create the perfect party invitation to match the theme of the party.

Themes

If you have an odd or bizarre theme, it may be hard to buy an invitation that is fitting. Your invitation sets the mood for the party so try your best to reflect the theme in your invitation. In addition, add any special requirements such as if there is a dress code as far as the theme is concerned. For example, a sledding party will need to have proper gear and for costume parties, make sure your guests know that they can dress up as pirates for example.

Sending Out Your Invitations

Invitations should be sent out no later than two weeks prior to the grand event. The delivering of the party invitations can sometimes be a bit tricky especially if your child is hand delivering them at school. Those not invited may feel jilted and have hurt feelings. One suggestion is that you ask the teacher to put the individual cards in the appropriate student's book bag at the end of the day, or if your child is old enough, ask that they discreetly hand them out and why. Mailing the invitations is another option but if you do not have all the guests home addresses, it may not be plausible. Schools do not freely hand out other students home addresses without prior permission from the parent.

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There is always the option of sending E-vites invitations via email but you can risk them not always necessarily being picked up in time. Make sure to always include an RSVP within the invitation, the time the party starts and ends and if gifts are not required, state that as well. A week before the party, call anyone who has yet to RSVP. When dealing with children they can be known for misplacing things that are to be given to their parents. A parent may have not responded because they were not even aware of the event. Approximately two or three days before the party confirm the total headcount that will be attending. This will help you to know if you may have to pick up a few more items.

Chapter 4 Choosing a Party Theme

Without a solid theme, you really have no direction as far as decorations, party favors, food, games, or activities are concerned. There is no one better theme than another and as long as your child is happy with the theme, that is all that matters and of course, if your budget allows it. Choosing a theme is probably the most exciting part of planning a birthday party – you can allow you and your child's imagination to go wild!

For first birthdays, bear in mind to keep the numbers low. A couple of other children are more than adequate and a theme is not really necessary unless you have to have one. Baby party decorations in bright primary colors are enough to stimulate a little ones mind. Take advantage of the ease in this one, because here on out they get a bit more involved.

Ideas for Themes

A few big blown up beach balls, plastic containers with plastic spoons so they can make music, tunnels that can be made out of cardboard boxes decorated with wrapping paper are next to irresistible for a one year old to crawl through. Poster board and washable finger paints are also a great activity and cereal can be used to dump back and forth between plastic containers.

The Land Before Time is a big hit with a five-year-old crowd whereas Dinosaurs are a huge hit for 8 year old boys but varied from The Land Before Time theme. Older boys want the realistic looking dinosaurs and both are easy to accessorize for. The Land Before Time theme can have a non-stop showing of the Land Before Time series while the home or even backyard is decorated in a prehistoric theme.

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There is a lot of Land Before Time toys available on the market that can help decorate or more then likely, if your child is a huge fan you already have a good number of them saving you from decoration cost. You can use papier mache to design huge boulders and even prehistoric looking trees. Use a large box from an appliance store to make a prehistoric cave. The possibilities are endless if you just give it a little thought. Some of the same ideas can be incorporated into an 8 year olds dinosaur theme.

Off Site Parties

The older the kids often means more kids invited and a bit more of an expense but if you are wise in your decisions it does not need to break the bank. Off site parties can get quite expensive especially if there are admission fees such as theme parks, sporting events, movies, skating rinks, lazer tag and paint ball facilities. Make sure you limit the number of guests on any of these types of events. The day and time of the week can play a role on admission cost too.

It is generally cheaper to rent a room at a center for a dance party in the middle of the week rather then a weekend. If your child bulks at the idea of having their party on a weeknight, simply explain to them they have a choice, if it is held on a weekend less guests can attend, if it is held on a weekday they can invite more guests. Still have the top set number you will allow in either situation and stick to your guns.

At Home Parties

Many theme parties can be pulled off quite nicely in a home. The Retro Theme works well in a home and outdoors. You can save some money by hitting the second hand stores and picking up some tee shirts that can be tie-dyed. A few other supplies you may want to consider is face paints, and fabric paints. Pull out the old record player and some good oldies and let them have at it in the back yard. Take tons of pictures, and encourage guest to wear clothing that matches the era.

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A chocolate fondue party is also a hit with the teens. Between a chocolate fondue and a chocolate fountain that you can rent from any party supply store, fresh fruits, nuts, cookies, marshmallows, pretzels and other great chocolate dipping foods, the kids will be sure to remember their chocolate highs. A luau is also a feasible at home party to have. Many dollar stores carry a lot of Hawaiian party supplies for cheap. Throw some Tiki poles in the back yard, some blow up wading pools, order some grass skirts and request the guests come dressed Hawaiian style.

Large platters of fresh fruit can be served, with Hawaiian music playing in the background and you may even want to fire up the grill and throw on a few slabs of Hawaiian Spare Ribs. A casino theme is also a huge success. Instead of winning money, have small gifts that the guests can turn in their poker chips for.

With the teens comes the Sweet Sixteen Party as well. Some great suggestions for a Sweet Sixteen Party are dance parties, a formal night out party, spa party, karaoke party, and a slumber/beauty party. The main thing to keep in mind is that the party does not need to be hugely elaborate; it has to be done with the heart. That is what will shine through in the end.

Chapter 5

Party Games and Activities

No-one likes to lose, so first and foremost, before picking any games to play at your child's birthday party, make sure they are age appropriate and have enough prizes for everyone, win or lose. There are many different games that can be played at birthday parties or any kind of party.

Toddlers do not require very much, maybe a few balls or some finger paints and they are happy. Children between 3 and 10 years old are a bit more active and need to stay busy to be happy for the most part. This age group thrives on interaction and is a blast to play games with.

Teenagers

It gets a little trickier when you are dealing with 11 to 13 year olds as they bore quickly. If the game appears even the slightest bit babyish, they will bulk at participating. So it pays to be a little more choosy when picking out games for this age group as they have their 'cool factor' and 'street cred' to protect. Talk to your child and run all games by them first to see if they think their friends would enjoy playing any of them. It may end up being a movie/pizza party or a sleepover for this age group.

For 14 year olds and up, your young teen has become more comfortable with who they are and will even laugh and enjoy some more immature games that at 11 through 13 they would not have dreamed being caught participating in. However, still make sure that the majority of the games you choose are in the appropriate age category.

Ideas for Games and Activities

Animal Game

This is a great game to build with your child a couple of weeks before the party. Collect a bunch of old magazines or coloring books and cut out pictures of different animals. You may want to glue them to note-book cards to make them sturdier. The game goes like this. Each guest will get a picture of a different animal pinned with safety pins to the back of their shirt. Make sure you let all the children know first though that they are not to tell each other what animal is pinned to the back of each other's shirt. The child then asks questions like, "Do I have four legs?" or "Do I have a tail?" until they can guess what animal they are. This is a great time to have a grab bag handy. When they guess which animal they are, they get to take one item out of the grab bag - no peeking though!

Design Your Own Name Tag Activity

When guests arrive, have a craft table set up where they can design their own name tag. Have markers, stickers, glitter etc available for them to use their artistic abilities. If they are smaller children, you can help them by writing their name yet allow them to decorate as they wish.

Butterfly Crafts Activity

For this activity, you will need coffee filters, pipe cleaners, a spray bottle and some magnets. Let the children color the coffee filters with markers. When they have finished, spray them with water and the marker will run giving it a tie-dyed look. Allow the coffee filter to dry completely and then gather in the middle. Use the pipe cleaner to wrap around the center making its body and then a shorter piece slid under the body to make the antennas. Glue a magnet to the back and the children have a gift to bring home to their parents.

Bob the Builder Activity

This activity is perfect for the Bob the Builder party theme. For this activity, you will need enough unfinished birdhouses for each guest to have one and a couple of spares, paint, and paint brushes. You can get small birdhouses from many craft stores or you can make some out of balsa wood. To bring the theme to life you can make Bob the Builder work aprons. Have the workstation set up and allow the children to paint their birdhouse in their own special design. Yet another gift the children can take home to their parents or keep as a party favor.

The Toothpick Marshmallow Tower Game

This is a cheap game for the young ones to play. All you need is some toothpicks and large and miniature marshmallows. It is probably not a wise game to play with very young children but if well supervised, 5 years and up should be fine. The object of the game is to see who can build the biggest tower. You can set a timer on it if you choose. So everyone can win you can do this game in sets of three children. For each set, there are three winners: one with the biggest tower, one with the most creativity, and one with the smallest tower. That way, with each round, no-one loses.

Musical Chairs

Another freebie! All you need for this game is chairs, enough for all guests or play it in rounds, music, and someone to operate the music. This game has been around forever and is always a winner with the little ones. You play the music as the children circle around the chairs and you remove one chair when the music stops. Whoever remains standing is out. You can either choose to give prizes with this game or not. If you choose to give prizes you can have some set up for first, second and third etc. Prizes do not have to be expensive – children love stickers for example, which are extremely low cost.

Boat Race Game

This game is great for little ones. All you need is a couple of roasting pans or deep cake pans, water, straws, and a few small bathtub toy boats. Give the children a straw and let them pick their boat. Time how long it takes them to blow their boat to the other end of the container.

The Mining Game

This game is great for any age and is low cost. Fill a cardboard box with popped popcorn and, depending on the theme, hide theme based party favors or candy in the popcorn. You can do it like dunking for apples, blindfolded, or with one arm tied behind the back, however you choose. They get to 'mine' until they pull out one item. Every one wins.

Spoon Walk

Another cheap game that is tons of fun. You can use practically anything but it's best not to use raw eggs especially if indoors. Golf balls or ping-pong balls work great with this game as well. The object of the game is getting the ball to the other side of the room without dropping it off the spoon. If you want to make it a bit tougher for the older kids, have them carry the spoon handle in their mouths.

Sock Game

Games do not need to cost money to be a riot and the sock game is proof of that. Get lots of socks, it does not matter if they match or not. The object of the game is to see who can put the most socks on the fastest. Set a timer (age appropriate, more time for little ones, less time the older they get) and have them go at it. You can make up categories so everyone wins, such as most socks on one foot, most on two feet, most colorful socks used, shortest socks, you get the idea.

Balloon Burst

All kids love balloons and this is a great activity you can have done up well before the party. Place inside each balloon a slip of paper stating what they have won; it can be a sticker, piece of gum, candy, or a gift out of the grab bag. Blow the balloons up and tie them off. Depending on the age of the children, determine what is used to burst the balloons to see what prize they have won. Little ones can sit on them or you can help them burst the balloon they choose.

Some other good ideas are Pin the Tail on the Donkey, coloring books and crayons, and face painting.

Mystery & Murder Mystery Games

For older children, mystery and murder mystery games is a great idea. The Internet has made these games free to anyone. A Google search with “Free Mystery and Murder Mystery Games” will bring up lots for you to choose from. You can also purchase more advanced versions of this type of game online. This would be a great task for the birthday child to get ready for the party. All instructions are included and they are great fun for the older child.

Indoor Golf Ball Croquet Game

This game makes for some hysterical pictures. Each guest will need one pair of pantyhose and two golf balls. Place the one golf ball in each leg of the pantyhose. Tie the pantyhose around the waist with the long ends of the legs hanging down in front of the guest. The guest will then take turns trying to make a golf ball that is placed on the ground into designated targets. You can use duct tape as targets or pieces of paper.

Karaoke Contest

For the brave teens, a karaoke contest can be a blast. They can pretend like they are the next up and coming American Idol and other guests can play the roles of the judges.

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Other great standbys are treasure hunts, board games, or letting each guest make their very own personal pan pizza. It can be a pizza bake off plus double as their snack.

Dressed for Work Game

You already have everything you need for this game. Supply the guests with enough adult clothes and a timer and see who can get dressed over their existing clothing for work on time. Longer time is allowed for younger children but speed up the time for older children and see who ends up half dressed when the time comes to “go to work”!

Pass the Orange or Tennis Ball

Make a relay with the guest having to go from one end of the room to the next holding either an orange or tennis ball under their chin and pass it on to the next person on their team. The first team to have all their players finish, wins. If the ball or orange is dropped, they can only pick it up with their neck. For younger children you can modify the rules to make it easier for them.

Bubble Gum Game

This is another relatively cheap game that only requires paper plates, whipped cream, and bubble gum balls. This is another great game for perfect picture moments so have your camera ready. Here is how it is played. Put a couple of gumballs on a paper plate and bury them with whipped cream. The guest has to dive in and find the gumballs! Messy, but hilarious!

Build your own Maze Activity

Hit your nearest appliance stores and department stores for this game in a hunt for as many extra large boxes as you can find. This activity involves letting the kids take the boxes and make mazes they can crawl through. Don't forget to recycle when you are done.

Chapter 6 Birthday Party Food

Birthday party food does not need to be elaborate, just kid friendly and in some cases, such as for toddlers, age appropriate. Sure-fire wins in most every age group are pizza, hot dogs, hamburgers, and tacos. Now the theme of your party will play a role on what foods you may serve but does not need to dictate it. For a Hawaiian luau theme, you may choose to serve traditional Hawaiian foods, however you could get by having Hawaiian pizza (Canadian bacon and pineapple) as a dish.

Snacks and Dips

Not everyone is going to want to dive into it necessarily, but it sets the base allowing you to also throw in a few cheese or pepperoni pizzas. They will remember the Hawaiian pizza offered for sure which saves the theme. Vegetable trays can be good as long as they are served with a dip and fresh fruits are always great. If you go with hot dogs, make sure to have all the trimmings; throw in a few bags of chips and you are good to go. Be careful of the mini sandwiches, although they are cute, after 10 minutes in the air, they start to dry out, and kids will turn their noses up at them. So unless you are able to keep them fresh and soft, you probably should rethink that choice. Chicken wings, pizza rolls, mini corndogs, chicken fingers, meatballs, and little sausages also make great snack type foods. Children are going to want to eat as they are creatures of habit. It does not necessarily mean they are hungry, but if it is out there, they are going to eat it. They probably will not recall everything they ate as they will not be as concerned about the food as they will be about the action, so do not stress too much over preparing a reward-winning feast as they will be just as thrilled with a bag of chips and a dip. In addition, remember, there is still the cake and ice cream.

Depending on the children's ages at the party and your child's wishes, you may choose to do cupcakes and save the birthday cake for a family birthday dinner. Cupcakes are quicker and easier to serve and more times than not will be fully

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eaten. Cupcakes are much easier for children especially under the age of six. When it comes to the ice cream, stick to the basics, chocolate and vanilla. It will save many headaches in trying to figure out who wants what. Remember, a happy host makes for happy children.

Chapter 7 Birthday Party Favors

Party favors are an absolute necessity and it is your obligation as a parent to provide your child's birthday party with party favors. This does not mean you need to break the bank, it just means you had better have something to offer on the table. That is like the coolest thing to a kid when they go to a party and the one thing your child's friends will comment on to your child, how awesome the party favors were that they received. If no favors were supplied, they will more than likely complain immensely about what a bore the party was.

Be Creative

Creativity can pay off huge here. Depending on the age of the child is also going to factor in on the amount of money spent out for party favors. Luckily the older children, 14 and up do not necessarily expect party favors anymore. However, a 10-year-old girl inviting 10 friends over for a make up party can get costly in party favors. As far as make up party themes go, it's a good idea to check with your nearest Avon dealer and ask to look at their discounted or close out pamphlets. It is a great way to get fingernail polishes and lip glosses for the preening beauties.

Dollar stores are another great way to save the pocket book for any theme! They carry everything from party supplies such as loot bags, or otherwise known as goody bags, and a wide variety of party toys and toys in general that would work great. A couple of packages of army men coming 30 in a package will work great split up used in goody bags for an army theme party.

Standbys

Some great standbys that make excellent fillers for goody bags are individually wrapped cookies, candy, suckers and token toys such as rings, pencils, stickers, noisemakers, and small individual play-dough packages. One key pointer to keep in mind is, the bigger the bag, the more you have to buy to fill it properly. Think of things you have seen your child come home with from parties. What was your

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first impression? What was your child's impression? Base your shopping on that. If your child was less than thrilled with the party favors received at another's party, you can bet that if you buy the same types of things, the guests will not be pleased either.

Some ideas for kids that are 10 and older are glow necklaces, light up rings, bracelets, necklaces, hats, photo frames, personalized gifts, wrapped candy bars, personalized pens or pencils, die cast cars, or nail files. Just use your imagination and in the three to four weeks you have to plan, watch for things on sale or discontinued items that would be unique.

Activities for Party Favors

Here are just a few more activities you could incorporate into your birthday party festivities where party favors are built in.

Purchase either 3x5 inch or whichever size you prefer of stock paper picture frames (the kind where a picture slides into them). You can get these at any art and craft supply store or order them online. Take a group picture on a digital camera of the birthday child with all their friends around them and print it off before the guests leave, putting each one into a photo frame. When the guests leave, they have a keepsake of the day and a picture of the guest of honor.

You can buy white tee shirts quite cheaply when you get them three in a pack or more or order them off line. Purchase enough tee shirts for all the guests and supply them with fabric paint. They can each design their own or use them for autograph tee shirts where everyone signs each other's tee shirt.

Kites and balsa wood rubber band operated airplane kits work great with the boys! It gives them an activity as well as a party favor to take home and still get a lot more fun out of them.

Sun visors and flip flop/thongs can also be purchased very cheaply if you buy them plain. Get enough for each guest and birthday child. Purchase some

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decorating supplies such as fabric paints, artificial flowers, glitter, ribbons, and pom-poms; you name it, what ever you think they would get a kick out of using. Allow them to decorate their own, ending up being yet another party favor and activity! A little imagination can go a long way.

Grab bags also work great for party game awards. Prizes for party games do not need to be anywhere near as fabulous as the party favors. Candy, stickers, mini note pads, pencils and other items along that line work perfectly. It is not so much you are awarding a win, or keeping a child who lost feel better, you are, in a small gesture, thanking them for playing along. Grab bags also eliminate a lot of arguing over who got what.

Conclusion

Remember, it is your child's birthday party and no matter how much we wish we could go back and create the birthday party of our dreams as a child, it is not about us. You want to be thought of as the coolest parent in your child's school, so in order to accomplish that, you have to put your wants to the side a little bit and focus primarily on the birthday child. Birthday parties are meant to be fun and it is your job to make sure that happens.

Do not attempt to pull off a smashing hit of a birthday party alone. You cannot do it - you will lose. There will be chaos on top of chaos and by the end of day, not only will your guests be crying, but you will be too!

Talk to the birthday child all through the planning procedure about proper manners. There may be a repeated gift or even a gift they do not like, but you want them to handle that type of situation and any other difficult situations that may come up, with excellent manners. Give them alternative things to say and practice with them. Explain to them that it is good manners for them to greet guests as they come in as well as when they leave. Instill the use of proper manners when receiving gifts and/or compliments.

Always have a back up plan and do not be afraid to use it! Have extra game and activity ideas available to you just in case for whatever reason another one falls short or they are played quicker than you anticipated.

Think safety! Make sure pets are put up regardless of how nice they may be. Some kids may just be plain afraid of them or they may make them feel uncomfortable. With toddlers, make sure sockets are covered and there is nothing they can get into that may cause them harm. With older kids, especially teenagers, make sure there are no alcoholic beverages they could get into or anything else that could cause them harm. If you are having a home pool party, make sure you have enough adults life-guarding the pool at all times. Keep small trinkets out of toddlers party favor bags.

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If children are dropped off for the party, make a point to greet the guest at the car if at all possible. This will give you another opportunity to reconfirm the party end time and ensure that the parent will return promptly at the end of the party to retrieve their child.

Lastly, and just as important, have fun and relax! Not everything has to be perfect and as long as everyone is having fun, that is all that really matters!

Here's wishing you the perfect birthday celebration ever!