

# Tips for planning a party your child will LOVE!

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Have you ever been to a baby shower and heard the advice given to the new Mum to ‘remember what it was like to be a child’? Now you’re organizing your child’s birthday party, this advice might just stop you from going insane! When the stress associated with organizing the party begins to build, just remember what was important to you as a child at your birthday party, and how special you felt to be the birthday kid. It probably didn’t really matter if the party decorations didn’t look perfect, or if the food didn’t turn out exactly like the picture in the cookbook. What mattered more was that the party was what you wanted and that your good friends were there.

As a child, it was important to me that my friends (especially my ‘best friend’) were at my party, that I got to pick my birthday cake, that the party bags were filled with the lollies and candies I liked, and that I got lots of presents! Whilst I may not have had much control over the presents part – my parents did involve me in the other aspects of the party that mattered to me. And let’s face it, involving your child is certainly one way to avoid, or at least reduce, tantrums or tears that could happen if things don’t go the way your child imagined.



This leads me to my first tip for planning a party your child will love. Ask your child what elements of the party they want to be involved in. This will give you an idea of what is important to them, and gives you a good starting point. I’d suggest also you talk to them about how many guests they would like, what type of party they want, and what sort of activities they would like to have at their party. This will also give you an indication of whether there needs to be some management of expectations. Remember though, don’t dismiss a child’s idea because it might be different to what you had envisaged, or is different to the way things were done in your day. It might just turn out that what might sound silly or boring to an adult could be exactly what all the kids these days find entertaining, no matter how hard it may be to believe!

Whilst my childhood memories are somewhat limited, I do remember fondly my birthday parties and those of my friends – from bowling parties, to sleepovers, to MacDonald’s parties, movie parties, and the traditional parties at home with pass-the-parcel and musical chairs. I’ve heard others talk excitedly about bike riding parties and laser zone parties they attended as kids. Party options are unlimited, and the party can be as creative or traditional as your child likes. For example, these days popular party ideas include scrapbooking parties, jewellery making parties, Xbox/Wii Sport parties, and afternoon tea parties – all options that are now ‘in fashion’ which may not have been around or have been popular when you were a kid. Keep this in mind as your child might come out with some ideas that you might consider a bit ‘left wing’!

So let’s get down to business. Here are some questions to get you thinking about every aspect of the organization of your child’s birthday party. These questions, organized under the common headings of ‘when, where, who, what, how’ will ensure you have thought through all aspects of the party planning.

## ★ When will the party be?

# When

- Make sure it doesn’t clash with another event (e.g. school holidays, the date of the local school football final, a public holiday, etc).
- Consider whether you want to have the party on the child’s birthday or whether it should be on the weekend before or after, or a couple of weeks later, etc.

## ★ When will you send invitations out?

- The earlier, the better. In this busy day and age, you want to ensure that the party date is set aside by your child’s friends (or their parents to be more specific). There is nothing more heartbreaking for you or your child than no-one being able to make it to the party because other plans have already been made. It’s a good idea to send out the invites three or four weeks before the party.

# What

- ★ What is the budget for the party?
  - Don't break the bank - parties should be fun rather than a cause of financial stress. Your budget needs to be determined at the very beginning as this will influence many aspects of the party including location, catering, guest numbers, etc.
- ★ What type of party will your child be having – themed party, an activity party (e.g. bowling), pool party?
  - You could suggest about three ideas/themes for the birthday party to your child and let your child choose their favourite – this gives them some autonomy to make a choice but limits the options so the decision is not overwhelming for them.
- ★ What activities will there be at the party (traditional party games, craft activities, games of sport)?
  - Choose games that will enable every child to win at least once. This will help prevent arguments and tears.
  - Have more games/activities than you think you need – it's better to be over prepared. This also allows you to quickly change tact if you sense the kids aren't enjoying a game or that it's not working, as you'll have spare activities up your sleeve.

- ★ Where will the party be (at home, at an external venue, etc)?
  - This will be influenced by your budget and your child's wishes. A party at home may be the cheapest option, but this also requires a lot of work (both in preparation and cleaning up). An alternative option may be to have it somewhere that specializes in kid's parties such as a 'fun factory'/play maze type venue, a go karting place, a bowling alley, fairy shop, cupcake shop, amusement park, game arcade, water park, fast food restaurant, or a museum. You could also host the party at the local park or another nice outdoor location (however remember to have a wet-weather back up).

# When

- ★ Who will be invited – the whole class, a few select friends, parents, family?
  - This will be influenced by the venue, your budget and your child's social network, as well as whether the party is just for the child's friends or whether it will be the family get-together as well. Depending on the age of the children attending the party, you may need to invite the parents as well.
- ★ Who will organize the party – will you organize it yourself or will you pay an event co-coordinator, party planner or virtual/personal assistant to organize it?
  - Whilst your child should help organize some of the fun elements of the party, you need to decide to who will 'project manage' it – will this be you, or will you hire someone to do the job (or perhaps palm it off to Grandma...)?
- ★ Who will run the party on the day?
  - Who will run the party games, serve the food, clean up, supervise the kids, etc?
  - Allocate roles to adults and older siblings who will be at the party. Older siblings can be great helpers at parties – but make sure they are clear on their role so they don't end up MIA (missing in action). Don't be afraid to ask people to help out at the party – don't do it all on your own, an over stressed mum or dad will really dull the party mood.

# Who



- ★ How long will the party go for?
  - This will depend on the age of your child. If they're young, keep it short – perhaps 2 or 2.5 hours – a party that is too long won't be fun for you or the kids.
- ★ How will the party be run?
  - Create a running schedule. If the party is from 1-3pm, then have you could begin with a 20 minute activity that kids can join in as they arrive, then serve party food for 30 minutes, then have two more activities or games, then have the birthday cake.
- ★ How will you decorate?
  - Keep it simple. Don't put all your energy and money into the decorations. Sure, you want to make the place look celebratory, but don't go overboard because the truth is – the kids will barely notice. Some balloons and a happy birthday banner will keep the kids happy.

# How

One last tip for the party - remember, "you are only young once, but you can be immature for a lifetime" (John P. Grier). Be a responsible adult, but also let your hair down and have fun with kids. This will make it an enjoyable experience for all rather than a stress filled occasion. Take plenty of photos, reminisce about the party with your child afterwards, and enjoy the experience from start to finish as your child will only have that birthday once! And most important of all – don't worry if the party doesn't quite go as planned!