



Tips for Planning the Perfect Kids Party
Secrets to The Best Party Ever!

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Everyone wants to hear their kid say, “That was the best birthday party ever!” And when your child grows up and you ask, “What was your favorite birthday party?” you will want them to say “Well, I really don’t know! They were all so fantastic it is hard to pick out just one!” You know you want to be the parent whose child brags about you at school for giving the best and most creative birthday parties ever. Does this mean you have to spend a ton of money to achieve this fame?

No, not at all! You will be surprised at how little you have to spend to put on a fantastic birthday party, which will leave your wallet and your child happy.

Chapter 2 – Must Know Birthday Party Secret Tips

Face it—getting a group of kids together for a birthday party, regardless of age, takes a lot of finesse, quality thought and consideration, time, and sometimes a lot of Tylenol. Some people have a real knack for party giving and appear to handle it with ease while others barely escape by the skin of their knees. Those who appear to tackle any size birthday party, regardless of their child's age seemingly do so because they have mastered the skill of organization and have nerves of steel.

However, for those of us who have neither mastered organization nor achieved the nerves of steel, here are some tips that will help your next birthday party go without a hitch:

Tip One:

You are creating a birthday party for your child. Unless it is a surprise party, you should always involve your child 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 grand day alone will keep them amped in helping make sure everything that needs to be done is completed.

Of course, if it is a toddler party, although their input is great, their participation in preparing for the event should be age appropriate. Allow your child to give 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 fill out invitations, and decorate.

Tip Two:

The dreaded guest list! This is where you may have to draw some boundaries. With 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, if allowed, would invite their entire school. Know your limitations first. Ask yourself just how many screaming, laughing, loud, and rowdy kids can you handle at one time.

Give your child a ballpark number and shoot low first. Offer to invite less than the number of kids you can handle comfortably. Say if your maximum is ten kids, offer your child 5 guests. Allow them to counter. If it gets up to ten you are still within your limitation range, yet your child feels like they made the final call.

Keep in mind the ages of the kids being invited 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, add one and invite no more guests than that number. Therefore, for a 3 year old's birthday party the most guests you would invite would be four. The average party guest-list is 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 be located (in the home, yard, roller or ice skating rinks, 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 location cost when giving an allowable head count.

Tip Three:

Honestly, do you want to have an all day birthday party? Here's where you get to pull in the reins and set a time limit for the blessed event! How long do you want the party to go on? Toddler parties are easy to put a time limit on.

Toddlers tire quickly for the most part and other parents may have their child on a strict routine. Generally, an hour to an hour-and-a-half is ample time for a toddler's birthday. Kindergarten to 3rd grade can vary a bit more depending on the individual child. However, no more than 3 hours is needed to celebrate in a smashing style.

Again, this is a time to know your limitations and stick to them. Older children are going to think they want their party to go on all day and night. This is where you have the option of either saying "Too bad, so sad" or again you can make a low bid offer and allow them to think they are getting more than you desired. Older kids love thinking they are one-step ahead of you. When they are adults, you can pass on the secret to them when they are planning their child's birthday party.

Tip Four:

Theme picking! Chapter Four will go more in-depth with party themes, however there are a few things to keep in mind before solidifying one. For a toddler you can pretty much pick a theme by selecting anything your toddler takes a special liking too. If they have yet to show any real interest in one thing or another you can bet whatever you choose will go over just fine.

Discuss different party themes with the birthday child. Throw out a few ideas, allow them to add their own and have them pick a few of their favorites. Take each idea and write it down on an individual piece of paper or large notebook card. This is where brainstorming comes in. You and your soon-to-be guest of honor will write down ideas on decorations, food, the cake, games, party favors and party location for each theme. Once you get the basics written down, look at each individual theme and pick out the top three.

Base your decision on your budget, ease of pulling it off, as well as child's enthusiasm (within reason of course). From the top three picks, revisit supplies needed to pull it off as well as location and see if there is anything that cannot be accommodated.

If all of them are within your budget and capability range, you can give your child one of two options: they can 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.

Tip Five:

Keep the kids happy and active! Have plenty of games for the kids to participate in and keep the downtime to a minimum. It is much easier to keep children actively involved outdoors at summer birthday parties, yet it does not mean that a sledding party or an ice-skating party with hot cocoa cannot be done in the winter. There are also many games that can be played indoors that do not require much preparation. Regardless of the time of year for the party, you should always have several backup games for the children to play.

In the summer, you could be stuck with a rainy day and in the winter it could be too cold to go out. Chapter Six will give you lots of game ideas for both indoors and outdoors for varying age groups. Factor in approximately two games per hour of party minus time for cake and ice cream.

Make sure to have enough party game gifts so whether a guest wins or loses they will receive a gift. No one likes to lose and you want everyone to enjoy the party and be happy.

Tip Six:

Always have a back-up plan. As mentioned in Tip Five, weather may not always permit the intended party plan. In these cases, you had better have a great back up plan or be ready to see a houseful of kids with idle hands and a very unhappy child on their birthday. Have an alternate location picked out in advance if your home will not accommodate all your guests in the event of rain.

Regardless, always make sure food is mobile and you have plenty of back up games up your sleeve! Do your best to readjust the party to the new environment in a relaxed manner. Getting uptight will be quickly sensed and the young guests will react accordingly. As long as you appear to be having a great time, the guests will too.

Tip Seven:

Set your ground rules way in advance in regards 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. 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 the 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.

Tip Eight:

Make a point to make the birthday child's day a special event between the parent(s) and child. This is a great time to extend an extra act of kindness or steal a few special moments with the birthday child. Make their favorite breakfast and serve it with a sentimental card or a letter hand written to them telling them all the things that you adore about them.

Yes, you have put a lot of effort into making sure they have a fantastic birthday party, but nothing can compare with that special time you sneak in on their special day to let them know they are worth it.

Tip Nine:

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 younger kids though, piñatas can become frustrating when they do not have the strength to bust it. Check to see if your piñata comes with an escape trap operated by a pull string. Little kids 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 the kids, make sure the piñata is big enough to hold enough candy to go around. You do not want anyone feeling left out. If there are some shy kids in the crowd, have some leftover candy 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 kids first, working up in age and size. Most importantly, keep the other children back when one is up to bat!

Tip Ten:

Do not be afraid to ask for help! You will need it. There is no way you can be in more than one place at one time. When it comes time to prepare the food, cut the cake, serve the ice cream or whatnot, you will want to have someone who

will keep the games going until it is time to settle to eat or enjoy some cake and ice cream. Some great people to consider in giving you a helping hand are friends, relatives, another child's parent, a favorite babysitter, or an older sibling.

Generally, you will find most parents of 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 out some of the responsibilities. You may think you are a super parent, but 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.

Tip Eleven:

Just like Santa Claus—use a list and check it twice, gonna make sure if you missed anything or not, because the birthday party is coming real soon! I love lists and that is why I've included a handy party checklist in the next chapter. Forgetting something can easily break the party flow. Unbelievable but true, there have been more occasions than you can imagine where the host has forgotten to pick up the birthday cake or in the midst of all the planning did not stop long enough to buy a gift for their birthday child. Trust me on this one, the list will save the day!

Tip Twelve:

Have your camera ready and at your disposal at all times. Try to capture as many pictures as possible. Have cameras available to other adults who are helping you as well to catch 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 great moments from their view. Have them all developed on disk and print for another tip yet to come!

Tip Thirteen:

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 the day of 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, dependent on child's age, sit with them and help them fill out thank you cards to the guests for coming and for any gifts. This can even be done on your computer.

This would be a great time to use some of those great memory making pictures you snapped throughout the party to make the thank you note even more special.

Tip Fourteen:

Memorialize the event. A picture may speak a thousand words but a picture story says so much more. There are numerous programs available (and many that come on pictures you have developed on disc), 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. You do not need to be a computer geek to make a memorialized picture story disc of your child's birthday party.

This makes a great keepsake treasure that your child can 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 parent had taken the time to add captions, voice inserts, and music of the time, and you were 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 can make a scrapbook.

Incorporate pictures from the birthday party, preparation list, theme cards made to decide what kind of party to have, pieces of the wrapping paper and ribbons from the gift-wrapping, and add your own personal notes about what foods were served, games played, and guests in attendance in the scrapbook. You can also add particular quirks your child had at that age, likes and dislikes, accidents, bumps, bruises, and whatnots, much like you would in a baby journal. Either way, it will memorialize the day and the child's life and will make your child feel special on those days when you are no longer around to share those memories.

Chapter 3 – Birthday Party Checklist

The reality is no matter how you want to slice the cake, birthday parties do require work. Now, 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 preparation.
- Follow the timeline 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 to serve. Make a list of all the ingredients you will need and attach it to your checklist.
- Decide on the type of cake and whether you will be making it or purchasing one. If making the cake, add the needed ingredients to your party food shopping list. If ordering, make sure you check with the bakery to find out how soon the order needs to be placed to receive the cake on time!
- If ordering party favors or gifts online, allow ample time for them to arrive before the party.
- Have help enlisted early on and back-ups in case someone has to back out for any reason.
- Typical party times are 1 PM to 3 PM or 2 PM to 4 PM. If you are really energetic, go for the 1 PM to 4 PM. For toddlers and under, the ideal party time is 10 AM to 11:30 AM. Granted, 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 the facility's schedule. This can have its advantages and disadvantages.

Next, you will find the handy “The Perfect Birthday Party Checklist” and “The Perfect Birthday Party Shopping List” to help you stay on track and to ensure you do not forget anything.

The Perfect Birthday Party Checklist

3 to 4 Weeks before Party

- Pick date & time
- Make guest list
- Decide on budget
- Pick theme & décor
- Do online ordering
- Choose menu & drinks
- Make party supply list
- Choose games & activities
- Buy or create party invitations
- Book entertainment needed
- Reserve locale if off-site
- Decide if making or buying Cake

2 to 3 Weeks before Party

- Order or buy party favors
- Buy materials needed for games
- Mail invitations
- Purchase balloons
- Call & get help for party day
- Gather any already owned party supplies
- Begin making homemade Party Décor
- List any other supplies needed.
- Order any rental equipment needed (Dunk Tank, etc.)
- Buy film/tape
- Buy piñata, candy, & fillers
- Put guest list by phone and check off incoming RSVPs

1 Week before Party

- Do all heavy cleaning
- Order cake if not making
- Buy food and drink supplies needed for party
- Get the birthday candles
- Call non-RSVP'd guests
- Get disposable cameras for guests

2 Days before Party

- Check batteries for camera

- Buy extra batteries if needed
- Clean party area
- Make room in refrigerator for party food and drinks
- Confirm entertainment, cake, and any other arrangements that were made in advance
- Pick out some party music
- Confirm head count
- Prepare party favor bags
- Do any last minute shopping
- Get games and activities together

Day Before Party

- Clean bathrooms
- Decorate Party Room
- Childproof where needed
- Set up games and activities
- Set out party favors
- Prepare any food you can without threat of spoilage
- Wash outdoor tables/ chairs
- Charge camcorder
- Bake and decorate cake if making
- Pick up cake if ordered
- Pick up any last minute items
- If freezer space is available, pick up ice
- Treat yourself, order in or eat out!

Day Of Party

- Set out Cake
- Set out table settings and décor
- Last touches to game centers
- Get camera/camcorder ready
- Have disposable cameras ready
- Get food ready
- Check bathrooms for supplies
- Put pets out of the way
- Greet guests with smiles
- Have a ball!

Perfect Birthday Party Shopping List

TABLE

- Plates
- Napkins
- Plastic-ware
- Cups
- Tablecloth
- Decorations

ENTERTAINMENT/DECOR

- Party Favors
- Goodie Bags and Fillers
- Party Hats
- Noisemakers
- Games
- Balloons
- Decorations

REFRESHMENTS

- Food
- Drinks
- Ice
- Cake
- Snacks

EXTRAS

- Tape
- Scissors
- Batteries
- Battery Charger
- Camera
- Film/Memory Cards
- Video Camera
- Video tapes
- Markers
- Storage CD/Picture Disc

CLEAN-UP

- Paper
- Foil
- Plastic wrap
- Storage containers
- Toilet paper
- Paper towels
- Garbage bags

ATTACH GROCERY LIST!

ATTACH GOODIE BAG LIST!

ATTACH PARTY FAVORS LIST!

Chapter 4 – Perfect Birthday Party Invitations

You have your guest list and now it is time to start preparing invitations. First, you must obtain them. You can purchase invitations online, make them, or buy them from a card shop or discount store. A great many sites allow you to create your own birthday party invitation 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 you can make the perfect party invitation to match the theme of the party.

If you have an odd or bizarre theme, it may be hard to buy one 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 a dress code for the theme (for a sledding party you would want everyone to have proper gear; roller skating—bring skates if you have them; dress up parties and costume parties, etc.)

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 students’ book bags at the end of the day. If your child is old enough, ask that they discreetly hand them out and tell them 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.

There is always the option of sending e-vite invitations via email but you can risk them not being picked up in time. Make sure to always include an RSVP request within the invitation and the time the party starts and ends. 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 to misplace 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 of guests that will be attending. This will help you to know if you may have to pick up a few more items.

Chapter 5 – Choosing the Perfect Birthday Party Theme

Okay, is theme everything? YES, theme is everything. Without a solid theme, you really have no direction for decorations, party favors, food, games, or activities. Now is one theme better than another theme? No. As long as your child is thrilled with the theme, that is all that matters. That and of course whether or not your budget allows it.

Below, you will find various themes for various age groups. Feel free to choose one or make up one of your own! Choosing the theme is probably the most exciting part of planning a birthday party. You can allow your and your child's imaginations to go wild!

Perfect Party Themes for Children Ages 1 through 11

Rug Rats	Pokémon
Bear in the Big Blue House	Clifford the Big Red Dog
The Busy World of Richard Scarry	Paddington Bear
Outer Space or Aliens	American Idol
Barnyard	Bug or Critter
Beach Theme	Camping
Sports	Dinosaurs
Color	Carnival
Dress Up	Firefighter
NASCAR	Pajama
Pirate	Princess
Animal	Rainbow
Safari	Surf
Tea Party	Teddy Bear
Trains, Planes and Automobile	Deep Sea
Wild West	Wizard of Oz
Sponge Bob	Any Cartoon
Spooky	Ethnic Theme
The Land Before Time	Barbie

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

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. Poster board and washable finger paints are also a great activity. Cereal they can dump back and forth between plastic containers is another.

The Land Before Time is a big hit with the five-year-old crowd, whereas Dinosaurs are a huge hit for the eight-year-old boys. Older boys want the realistic looking dinosaurs. Both are easy to buy accessories 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.

There are a lot of Land Before Time toys available on the market that can help decorate. More than likely, if your child is a huge fan you already have a good number of them which will save you decoration costs. You can use Paper-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 old's dinosaur theme.

Perfect Party Themes for Children Ages 12 and up.

Amazing Race Theme
Camping Party
Fiesta Theme
Murder Mystery Theme
Polka Dot Theme
Scavenger Hunt
Spa Theme
Bowling Party
Laser Tag Party
Movie Night Party
Skating Party
Theme Park Party
50's Theme

Beach Party
Dance Party
Hollywood Theme
Pirate Theme
Pool Party
Slumber Party
Survivor Theme
Hotel Party
Limo Party
Paint Ball Party
Sporting Event Party
Retro Theme

The older the kids are often means more kids are invited, resulting in 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, laser tag and paint ball facilities. Make sure you limit the number of guest on any of these types of events. The day and time of the week can play a role in admission costs.

It is generally cheaper to rent a room at a center for a dance party in the middle of the week than on a weekend. If your child balks 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, fewer guests can attend and if it is held on a weekday, more guests can be invited. Still have the top number you will allow set in your mind for either situation and stick to your guns.

Many theme parties can be pulled off quite nicely in a home. The Retro Theme works well in a home or outdoors. You can save some money by hitting the second hand stores and picking up some tee shirts that can be tied-dyed. A few other supplies you may want to consider are 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 guests to wear clothing that matches the era.

A chocolate fondue party is also a hit with the teens. You can do chocolate fondue or a chocolate fountain which can be rented from any party supply store, fresh fruits, nuts, cookies, marshmallow, pretzels and other great chocolate dipping foods. The kids will be sure to remember their chocolate highs.

A luau is also feasible for an at home party. Many dollar stores carry inexpensive Hawaiian party supplies. Throw some Tiki poles and blow up wading pools in the back yard, order some grass skirts and request that the guests come dressed Hawaiian style. Large platters of fresh fruit can be served with Hawaiian music playing in the background. You may even want to fire up

the grill and throw on a few slabs of Hawaiian Spare Ribs. A casino theme can also be a huge success. Instead of winning money, have small gifts that the guests can get in exchange for their poker chips.

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 elaborate; it has to be done with the heart. That is what will shine through in the end.

Chapter 6 – Perfect Party Games and Activities

Face it, no one likes to lose so first and foremost, before picking any games to play at your birthday boy's or girl's party make sure they are age appropriate and that you have enough prizes for everyone, win or lose. I could have written a whole e-book full of different games that can be played at birthday parties, actually any kind of party. There are so many one can choose. However, for space purposes I have been forced to limit my selection.

However, you can choose to use any of the games listed or make your own variations of them. Once you start reading some of these chosen birthday party games I am sure your creative mind will kick in and you will think of a few fun ones of your own.

Children under the age of one as I mentioned in Chapter 5 do not require much. A few balls, maybe some finger-paints and they are happy. However, a section below includes games that could easily fall under any age group. Depending on your toddler, one of them may also work well with your group. Children between the ages of three and ten are more active and need to stay busy to be happy. Face it, this age group is a blast to play games with, and they get the rules. This age group thrives on interaction.

It gets a bit trickier when you are dealing with 11 to 13 year olds. They bore quickly and they are trying out their "images." If the game appears even the slightest bit babyish, they will balk at participating. So be choosy when picking out games for this age group—they have their "cool factor" 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 that a movie/pizza party or a sleepover is all this age group will want.

Thankfully this stage passes. By 14 years of age 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 dared being caught playing. However, still make sure the majority of the games you choose are in the appropriate age category.

Games and Activities for Children 1 through 10

Animal Game

This is a great game to build with your child a couple 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 notebook 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 kids 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 ask inquiry question 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. (That will be covered more in Chapter 8) 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 nametag. Have markers, stickers, glitter, and whatnots available for them. If they are smaller children, you can help them by writing their name yet allowing 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 kids color the coffee filters with markers. When they have finished, spray them with water and the marker will run giving it a tied-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 spares, paint, and paint brushes. You can get small birdhouses from many craft stores however if you are handy, rather than purchasing small unfinished birdhouses you can make some out of basal wood. To bring the theme to life you can make Bob the Builder work aprons.

Have the workstation set up and allow the kids to paint their birdhouse in their own special design. Yet another gift you child can bring home to their parents or keep as a party favor.

The Toothpick Marshmallow Tower Game

This is a cheap game for your 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 real young children, but if well supervised 5 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 each round no one loses.

Musical Chairs

Another freebie! All you need for this game is chairs (enough for all guests or they can 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 kids circle around the chairs you remove one chair and 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 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. out rewards. It can be something as simple as stickers! Kids love stickers.

Boat Race Game

This game is great for little ones. All you need is a couple roasting pans or deep cake pans, water, straws, and a few small bathtub toy boats. Give the kids a straw and let them pick their boat and time how long it takes them to blow their boat to the other end of the container. If they are too young to blow well, have them try to get their boat to the other side only using the straw.

The Mining Game

This game is great for the entire age group and is cheap. 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. Everyone wins.

Spoon Walk

Another cheap game that is tons of fun. You can use practically anything but I do not recommend using 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 mouth.

Sock Game

Games do not need to cost money to be a riot and the sock game is proof of that. I am not sure about other parents, but I have never had much luck getting little ones to put their socks on themselves. Well with this game, they will not only put them on themselves, they will love doing it as well! Get a mess load 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 appropriately, 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 set 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 grab out of the grab bag. Blow the balloons up and tie them off. The age of the children will 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 chose.

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

Games and Activities for Children 11 and Up

Mystery & Murder Mystery Games

The internet has made this game free to anyone. A Google search with “Free Mystery and Murder Mystery Games” will bring a ton up for you to choose. 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. All Instructions are included and they are great fun for this age group.

Indoor Golf Ball Croquet Game

This game makes for some hysterical pictures. Each guest will need one pair of panty hose and two golf balls. Place the one golf ball in each leg of the panty hose. 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 hit 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 that they are the next American Idol and other guests can play the roles of the judges.

Other great stand-bys are treasure hunts, board games, or letting each guest make their very own personal pan pizza. It can be a pizza bake-off that doubles as their snack.

Games and Activities for all Age Groups

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 come time 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 some 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 picture perfect 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 whip cream. The guests have 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 that they can crawl throughout. Do not forget to recycle when you are done.

Chapter 7 – Perfect Birthday Party Food

Birthday party food does not need to be elaborate, just kid friendly, and in some case, 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 in what foods you serve but does not need to dictate it. For a Hawaiian luau theme, you may choose to serve traditional Hawaiian foods, or you could get by having Hawaiian pizza (Canadian bacon and pineapple) as a dish.

Sure, not everyone is going to want to dive into it necessarily, but it sets the base allowing you also to throw in a few cheese or pepperoni pizzas. They will remember the Hawaiian pizza offered for sure which saves the theme. I personally love Canadian bacon and pineapple pizza. Vegetable trays can be good as long as they are served with dip, and fresh fruits are always great. If you go with hotdogs, 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 become dried out and kids will turn their noses up to them.

Chicken wings, pizza rolls, mini corndogs, chicken fingers, meatballs, and little sausages also make great snack type foods. Yes, children are going to want to eat, 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 more than likely won't even fully recall all that they ate, as they will be more concerned with the action than with the food.

So do not stress too much over preparing an award-winning feast—they would be just as thrilled with a bag of chips and dip. In addition, remember there is still the cake and ice cream.

Depending on the childrens' 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 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 8 – Perfect Birthday Party Favors

Party favors are necessary! 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.

Creativity can pay off huge here. The chapter regarding party games and activities offers quite a few activities with built in party favors. The age of the child is also going to factor in on the amount of money forked 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, I suggest you check with your nearest Avon dealer and ask to look at their discount 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 (otherwise known as goodie 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 goodie bags for an army theme party.

Some great standbys that make excellent fillers for goodie 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 first impression? What was your child's impression? Base your shopping off 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 led necklaces, light up rings, bracelets, 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 that have been discontinued that would be unique.

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

Purchase 3x5 inch (or whichever size you prefer) 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 and print them up 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 cheap when you get them three or more in a pack or if you order them online. 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 (everyone signs each other's tee shirts).

Kites and basal 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.

Sun visors and flip flop/thongs can also be purchased very cheap if you buy them plain. Get enough for each guest and the birthday child of course. Purchase some 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 and creating yet another party favor! A little imagination can go a long way

In closing on party favors, I do want to mention the grab bag. Grab bags 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 those lines work perfectly. It is not just that 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.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to leave you with a few simple birthday party rules. 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 do 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 aside a little bit and focus primarily on the birthday child.

Birthday parties are meant to be fun and it is our 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 guest be crying, but you will be too.

Talk to the birthday child during planning 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 and thank them 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 in case another one falls short or the others are played quicker than you anticipated.

Think safety! Make sure pets are put kept out of the way regardless of how nice they may be. Some kids may just be plain afraid of them or pets may make them 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 lifeguarding the pool at all times. Keep small trinkets out of toddlers' party favor bags.

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 assure that the parent will return promptly to retrieve their child.

Lastly, have fun. 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!