



Birthday Home Party Pointers

By Judy Arnall

Over the past 19 years, with five children of various ages, I have organized a total of 74 birthday parties. Due to the rising cost of outside-the-home parties, we have had many home parties that were just as fun, inexpensive, and customized for the birthday child's desired theme. Involving the birthday child also gives them a valuable appreciation for the effort required to host a party.

Here are some tips for hosting a home birthday party:

1. Ask for help. You can always use an extra pair of adult hands. Round up the older children to write invitations, shop for supplies, prepare food and decorations and treat bags. They can also serve refreshments and help with games.
2. Keep a bucket of warm soapy water and a cloth handy for spills, throw up, and potty accidents.
3. Serve tiny portions of food and slivers of cake. Children are often too excited to eat.
4. Serve lots of drinks, but in small portions. Children are always more thirsty than hungry.
5. Parties for children ages one to three are really for the parents, who love to chat while keeping careful eyes open for their little sweeties, so have some adult refreshments on hand too.
6. Parties for children ages four and up, begin to learn social graces – how to accept unwanted presents, how to share, take turns at games. As a hostess, you have to gently help them with the skills if parents are not staying.
7. It's the certainty of treat bags that counts, not the quality. One toy and one candy treat is adequate.
8. Time: 1 hour for under 2 years of age, 2 hours for under 5 years and 3 hours for under 10 years.
9. Don't clean BEFORE the party! No one will notice.
10. Pack away all breakables, and provide unstructured group toys for children under four. Also, you could set up stations such as paper and markers, paint, or play dough, and have little groups of children work at one station for 15 minutes and then switch as a group. Have an adult sit at each station so one of the guests doesn't color your bathroom while you are serving cake.
11. Save your baby gates to partition off bedrooms, halls and other off-limits places.
12. Encourage kids to watch the cake and gift opening but don't force them to. A great way to decide whose gift to open first is to use the months of guest's

birthdays. January birthday guests go first, then February, etc. For cake serving, start with December birthday guests and go backwards.

7 Commandments for Party Guests

1. Don't bring extra siblings or children unless permission is granted before hand.
2. Warn your child that a treat bag may or may not appear.
3. RSVP on the deadline or before. Nothing is more frustrating to an organizer than having to phone people who don't RSVP. If you say that you are coming, please show up! If you say that you're not coming, don't show up unannounced at the last minute!
4. Be cheerful and participate in all the activities in the spirit of the party.
5. If you are an adult staying with your child, be helpful. This is not the time for a heart to heart chat with the party hostess. Save that for after the party.
6. Teach your child discretion in sparing other children's feelings. Teach them to not talk about the party before it occurs and after.
7. Encourage your child to write thank you notes for the parent's who were not present. It's good practice and a nice touch.

7 Commandments for Party Host/Hostesses

1. Don't ask for the gift receipt so you can return the gift. Say a sincere thank you, and if it's not suitable, give it to a sibling, a charity, or try to return it without a receipt or even re-gift it.
2. Disclose full information about the party – If the party is half at home and half somewhere else, the parents need to know where the children are going, who is supervising, who is driving, how many seatbelts are available, and what the guest is required to bring.
3. Don't state preferred presents or money. It's okay to mention desirables if specifically asked.
4. Try to avoid competitive games. Cooperative games are more fun for all the guests and build friendships. Piñatas often encourage aggressive behaviour.
5. Don't distribute invitations at the school/preschool unless everyone is invited. Use email, facebook, or send a note to parents to contact you. Children tend to use invitation distribution at school as social currency and it is hurtful to those children who are not invited. Teach your child to not talk about the party plans before it occurs or rehash the event after it occurs.
6. Don't feel you have to include treat bags but if you do, one treat and one toy should suffice.
7. Feel free to put parents staying to work in helping you with serving, clean-up and crowd control. They are a valuable resource!

Enjoy the festivities!

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