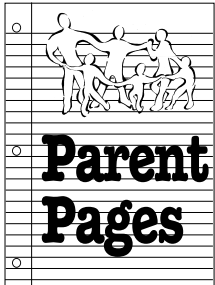


Planning Birthday Parties for Children



Needs and interests, not the adults', are addressed.

Kids' birthday parties can be times of great fun or great frustration. The frustration can be reduced and the fun increased if adults take the time to consider the developmental needs of the children involved and to plan the event accordingly. Birthday parties are most successful when the children's

Here are some general guidelines to consider:

How many and whom to invite

- ◆ The rule of thumb is to invite the number of guests that equals the age of the child plus one. For example: If the child is two years old, invite no more than three same-age guests. Whatever formula you use, it's important to remember that most children five and younger function best in small groups no bigger than five or six same-age children.
- ◆ Try to invite children who are all about the same age and who will then have similar interests, abilities and attention spans.
- ◆ Include all necessary information on the invitation: date, time, and location, name of birthday child, phone number and RSVP. Let parents know what kids should wear, whether or not they need to bring anything special, and when the party should end. Indicate whether parents need to pick kids up or whether kids will be taken home by you.

Duration

- ◆ It's better for kids to leave a party when they're having fun, so plan short parties. An hour is plenty for preschoolers; two hours is usually enough for school-age children.

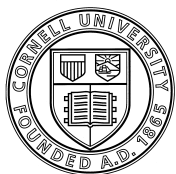


- ◆ Offer to drive the kids home if possible. In this way, you control how long the kids will stay, instead of waiting for late parents to pick up one or two stragglers.

Activities

- ◆ Plan age-appropriate activities. For two and three year olds, avoid competitive activities and activities that cause too much excitement, such as relay races. If you give out small prizes or gifts, make sure every child gets the same thing. Circle games, puppets, songs and stories are more likely to amuse young children without getting them "too wound up."
- ◆ By ages five and six, children have greater social and physical skills and enjoy participating in active games and races. It is still a good idea to tone down the competition so that everyone can participate equally and no child's feelings are hurt because she "lost."

~Continued~



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension
Orange County

Community Campus
18 Seward Avenue, Suite 300
Middletown, NY 10940-1919
845-344-1234

www.cce.cornell.edu/orange

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- ◆ Older children will enjoy special social outings with their friends, including trips to the skating rink, the beach or an amusement park.
- ◆ Many older kids enjoy craft activities. If you choose to do a simple craft, be sure to have all needed materials on hand and prepare an example ahead of time.
- ◆ Have several cartoon videotapes available just in case you need to take a video break and settle the kids down. For the most part, however, the television should be turned off so that kids can enjoy the special activities that have been planned.
- ◆ Plan more games and activities than you think you need. Kids generally complete things faster than you expect.

Food and refreshments

- ◆ When planning birthday foods and snacks, consider not only the age of the participants, but also the time of day. Two- and three-year-olds are not big eaters, so refreshments should be simple. Cupcakes (yellow or white cake to avoid chocolate stains) without too much frosting and juice are usually sufficient. Avoid candy and unnecessary sweets and serve refreshments at an hour that won't interfere with a main meal (early- to mid-afternoon is a good time).
- ◆ Older kids have bigger appetites. Instead of having kids fill up on sweets, plan the party around a meal or more nutritious mid-afternoon or evening snacks. Pizza parties and barbecues are terrific birthday events for kids.
- ◆ When preparing birthday snacks and refreshments, consider the preferences of the child, but avoid serving a lot of "junk" food and sweets. Substitute juice and milk for soda, fruit and homemade cookies for candy.

Location

- ◆ Younger children will respond best to a party in the home. As older children become more self-conscious about their status in the peer group, they may be a bit embarrassed by having friends visit and may prefer to go somewhere else.
- ◆ It's a good idea to take advantage of nice weather whenever possible and move the party outdoors. Decorate the front of the house so that your home is easy to find.

Themes

Party themes, such as "Backward Birthday Party" or "Prehistoric Birthday Party", are hugely entertaining and satisfying, but require sufficient planning. While younger children will not readily appreciate theme parties, the uniqueness and creativity of the event will excite older kids. Involve older children in choosing and carrying out the theme. Try to have all aspects, from invitations to party favors, incorporate the theme.

Help

Ask parents to help, but don't overwhelm the group of children with an even larger group of adults. Usually one or two other adults can provide enough supervision for a group of twelve or fewer children.

With some imagination and preparation, a parent or caregiver can create an exciting and enjoyable birthday event that will be remembered and appreciated for a long time.

Source: Tim Jabn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.