

## How to Organise a Party for Children (and Stay Sane)

So you think you would like to do it yourself?

You're brave!

Seriously though, giving a child's party yourself is invariably exhausting but very rewarding. The plus points can be many and varied: the children always seem to respond well to it - it's different - and can be more personal; the feedback is almost always very positive from both children and parents; you develop a relationship of trust with your child's friends; it makes a refreshing change from the claustrophobic atmosphere of the local indoor children's play area, bowling alley or leisure centre and it can be much cheaper.

So how to go about it, if you are new to it?

### 1. Get enough help

(i) Consider: family (even the in-laws), friends and other parents who could help you out.

(ii) Consider the number of children and a workable ratio of adults to children, given at least one person will be busy preparing, setting out and clearing food. You will need a higher ratio for craft activities and for younger children

Seriously. Do get enough help.

(iii) Consider paying for it. How about: childcare assistants, nursery nurses, local teenagers and babysitters? Children always respond well to other youngsters, but try to select those you can trust to be of use.

(iv) Proviso: Only ever ask for help from those you feel you can trust with the children. Never have an adult or teenager alone with a child: for your peace of mind as well as the safety of the children.

### 2. Plan ahead

(i) Think about the timing of arrival and departure.

Does it have to last three hours - you may be exhausted?

Can you fit in all you want to in one and a half hours - probably not?

(ii) Choose your party activities to suit.

From crafts, games, face paints and entertainers to garden games, bouncy castles and ball pits, bear in mind the mix of children to be invited as well as your child's preferences.

NB You will not be needing all of the above.

(iii) When best to fit in food?

This is usually after half way through and is likely to take up to half an hour. You might like to leave enough time for cake-cutting and a final activity afterwards.

(iv) Try to intersperse more energetic activities and excitement with a calming down period, especially before food.

Sleeping Tigers is a safe bet for younger children. (The children lie on the floor and try not to move or make a noise, whilst someone wanders in amongst them disqualifying any who move or talk. These children can then help with watching. Don't forget a tempting reward). NB children have been known to fall asleep!

(v) Have everything ready to hand before you start.

Plan and lay out: activities, crafts and games (blind folds, prizes, music etc). Have food defrosted, cake decorated, and party bags packed.

Include a time plan of the party- it helps everyone.

(vi) Have a game or two spare.

In the event something doesn't work or the party goes faster than expected it helps to have something in reserve.

Musical chairs, cushions or even pieces of paper would do in most instances- you could even make your own music.

(vii) Think through all the safety issues very carefully.

Consider food allergies: for instance, to peanuts.

If the children are to be driven in cars, comply with the law concerning seat belts and car seats and have enough cars.

Consider hazards such as roads, water (pools, lakes, rivers), drops, fires - can the children be made secure from such things?

What rules do you need to impose to keep the children safe on bouncy castles, trampolines or near water?

Make sure that security and safety rules are in place and enforced from start to finish.

Discuss safety with all of the helpers and use common sense. If in doubt - don't do it.

3. On the day

(i) Smile and keep smiling.

(ii) Enjoy it and try to enjoy each child.

(iii) Don't focus overly on shy or reluctant children.

It only makes them more self conscious or more attention seeking. Just give them kindly but casual sporadic opportunities to join in or help you out.

(iv) Start firm, remain firm and stay firm till they have all gone. THEN YOU CAN RELAX.

Remember: Kind and firm does it.

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