

THE PARENT'S PARTY PLANNING GUIDE



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Table of Contents

So You're Throwing a Party	3
Where?	4
When?	6
Theme	7
Invitations	8
Activities	10
Professional Entertainment	11
Food	13
Party Supplies	14
Party Day	15
Expect the Unexpected	16
Party Planning Timeline	17
About the Author	18

So You're Throwing a Party

But where do even you start to plan a party?

Start here!

This guide was written to help everyday parents plan the birthday party they desire! Whether it's a huge two-hundred people function, or a quiet five person get-together, everyone can benefit from this guide. **No event-planning experience needed!**

No more stressful party days! Never worry about forgetting something again! The goal of this guide is to give parents a proper framework for children's party planning. Follow the [Party Planning Timeline on page 17](#) and refer to the rest of the guide to begin planning your poppin' party!

So take a deep breath... and let's begin!

Where?

One of the first (and most important) decisions you must make is where the party will be held. Weigh your options and know what to expect before sending out invitations!

1) **Your own house:** First consider whether your house is suitable for a party environment. Remember that kids are very unpredictable, especially when surrounded by their best friends and have been eating sugar all day. If your home is full of breakables and antiques, it might be best to hold the party elsewhere (even in your backyard).

2) **A neighborhood park:** Parks are a great environment for **kids to be kids!** Bring soccer balls, activities, or just let kids play on the playground! Before planning a park party, contact the park association to make sure there aren't any regulations against parties. Many parks will rent out their covered structures, so make sure there aren't any reservations

during your party date! You don't want to show up to the setting to find out that someone has already (rightfully) set up there! Just bring a list of attending kids, set up a play perimeter with



3) **An entertainment center:** A great way to pre-plan the party entertainment and save time on setup/cleanup, but it will come at a higher cost. You can go laser-tagging, to a trampoline park, bowling, or to a children's gym! Kids love high-energy activities and parents will thank you for making their child sleep easily that night! As soon as you plan possible dates, call up the center to inquire about availabilities! Just keep in mind that going to an entertainment center may limit any other activities you may have planned. Keep in mind that if you go to an entertainment center, you will usually have to know an exact count of the children in attendance.

4) **A community center:** your local community center is a great place to hold the party you imagined, without inviting 20 wild kids into your precious home! Community centers have open spaces for activities you have planned and many centers will also have a party package where *they* will provide the entertainment activities.

Community centers can be easier than an entertainment center because you don't have to pay for *each* attendee – you



just rent the center and bring as many guests as legally allowed to fit in the room! Most families are familiar with local community centers, so getting there will be a breeze!

When?

“Well, it’s a *birthday* party, so we’ll hold it on the *birthday*, of course!” Think again! It may seem festive to hold the party on the actual birthday day, but there are a lot more options to think about.

About 95% of birthday parties are held on weekends, but that may not always be right for your party! Depending on the birthdate, the nearest weekends may be perfect... or far from it. Pull out your calendar! Spring birthday parties may interfere with soccer games, Fall birthday parties may interfere with Boy Scout trips, and Summer parties may interfere with family vacations, and Winter parties may interfere with ski lessons. Weekends surrounding a school break are popular travel weekends and attendance may be low on these weekends. Unfortunately, it’s impossible to know all your invitees’ schedules, but you can make an educated guess!

The Monday of a “three day weekend” may seem like the perfect date, but remember that many families take advantage of their mini-vacation to visit family or go sight-seeing. A Friday night is less likely to have sports conflicts, but some schools have clubs/after-school activities that may interfere.

The earlier you decide on a date, the earlier you can (and should) send out invitations.

When planning a party for young kids, plan the party around the children’s usual schedule. For young kids, plan to have the party at a time when the children won’t be too sleepy or too hungry. Often times, a late morning party time is perfect for younger children as they will have energy during the party, can eat pizza for lunch near the end of the event, then go home and nap! Older kids are less sensitive to



Overall, it’s a toss-up whether the date will work fine, but you can always make the best of it! Don’t worry if fewer-than-expected guests can attend. Smaller parties often create better connections and stronger memories!

Theme:

Party themes are a great way to add **interest and excitement** to any party. A theme will make it more likely for that party to be remembered out of all the other parties that children attend each year! Plus, your child will be thrilled when the party features a theme that they love!

But just because you're throwing a party doesn't mean you *need* a theme! Isn't a birthday enough to celebrate?

Themes can be your child's favorite sport, favorite TV show or video game, a favorite color, a favorite character/superhero, and more! Be creative!



Kids can have the craziest interests! Grayson, of Louisiana, was always transfixed when lawyer Morris Bart's commercials came on television. Grayson's mom decided to throw a party with a Morris Bart theme. *Grayson was thrilled!* Party themes are truly only limited to your imagination!

Invitations:

Remember when you were a child and had to send out invitations to *all* your friends and then anxiously awaited RSVPs?

Those days are over (well, sorta)!

Nowadays, more evites (electronic invitations) are sent out each year than physical cards! E-vites save paper, time, and the long process of waiting for RSVPs. Guests can RSVP almost immediately! Most evite services also send a reminder to guests prior to the party. No more "Sorry, we totally forgot!". Two of the more popular evite services are evite.com and punchbowl.com.



Invitations should be sent out **at least two weeks** ahead of the party date so that families can plan around the party; the earlier you can send out invitations, the more kids are likely to show up!

Before you send out invitations to everyone, it is recommended to inquire about your child's best friends' availability on the planned party date. When best friends can come, even the simplest of parties will be thrilling to your child. And yes, it's usually best to invite everyone in your child's class to avoid hard feelings.

The longer the party, the fewer the kids that should be invited! It's hard enough to handle 20 kids for two hours, but for the entire afternoon? Crazy! Sleepovers, the *longest* of birthday parties, should be reserved for only your child's closest friends.

The more information you can include in the invitations, the better! Always include:

- Birthday child's name and age they're turning
- Date and time of party
- Pick-up time
- Address of the party (directions help, too)
- Party theme (if there is one)
- What will be involved in the party (any activities, whether meals will be served, if any movies are being played)
- Your name and contact information (phone number and email address are enough)
- Anything guests will need to bring to participate in activities (eg. Bring sneakers if going to a park, bring pillows if it's a sleepover, bring swimsuit and towel for pool party.)



Activities:

“What will I do with all these crazy kids at my house for two hours?” you may think to yourself.

Don't fret! The good news is that kids will find things to do, even if you don't plan many activities. If there are toys in the house or a playset in the backyard, you can just turn on some fun music and kids will find fun ways to play with their friends.

Games are a great and inexpensive way to add entertainment to your party! Kids love playing games (and you'll love them too because games can keep kids occupied for hours)! Here is a list of some great party games to play:

- Musical chairs
- Pin the tail on the donkey
- Three legged race
- Egg-on-spoon relay races
- Treasure hunts
- Children's obstacle courses
- Crafts (take-home crafts double as a party favor!)
- Duck, Duck, Goose
- Dress-up
- Simon Says/Follow the Leader



Games can be played in 15-30 minute segments. **Just don't overload the kids** by switching from game to game too often (especially if they're still having fun)!

Tip: TV is good entertainment, but not necessarily for a party. It's not every day that school children come together at one of their friend's houses. Make the day special by turning *off* the television. They can watch all the TV they want (or that their parents will allow) when they get home! For longer parties and sleepovers, a movie can be a good way to "chill out" the kids (Okay, maybe some kids haven't developed their "chill out" setting yet). Just get parents' permission if the movie has a stricter rating than their age.

Professional Entertainment

Professional entertainers are sure to keep the kids entertained – it’s their job! Do your research and request quotes from multiple entertainers before hiring. Ask other parents for first-hand recommendations (or warnings).

If you want, you can show your child different entertainment options within your budget and have him/her choose who they like best (illusion of free choice, anyone?). Be aware that many entertainers offer entertainment packages beyond kids’ attention spans. **It’s always better to have a short but great act than a show which drags on and on.** You’ll save some money too!

Before you even look at different entertainment options, you will want to create an entertainment budget. Professional entertainment is not cheap. Expect to pay between \$150 and \$500 per entertainer you hire. Generally speaking, **you will get what you pay for!**



Get creative with your entertainment choice. Entertainment can make or break a party. **Keep the guests in mind when choosing entertainment.** Two year olds might not be able to fully appreciate a magic show, but they can appreciate a funny clown!

Tip: Be kind to the entertainers! Many full-time entertainers will perform at multiple parties each day and may be a bit stressed, but they will still try their best. Being hospitable to your entertainer will ensure that they’re set up for a great performance! Most entertainers will touch base with you a few days before the party to confirm the booking. If not, don’t be afraid to reach out to them!

Some of the more popular entertainment choices include:

- Magicians
- Clowns and Face Painters
- Balloon twisters (This option can save you money on party favors, too!)
- DJs
- Storytellers/Puppeteers
- Character impersonators
- Rentable Game Trucks (This option is a truck which parks outside your house and has various fun video games inside which the kids can play for a hour or so)
- Moonbounces



If the entertainer is a surprise to the kids, tell the entertainer that! Some entertainers will plan for this and can coordinate with you to make a very special surprise entrance for the

Shameless self-promotion of [Drew Blue Shoes](#) performing at a child's birthday party.

Food

Shorter parties may not require food, but if the party lasts two hours or longer, **providing food is a must!** Purchase food two to three days before the party so you don't have to worry about buying it *the morning of* the party! Keep the food in a safe place (where no hungry older brothers will accidentally eat it). **If the party takes place during lunch/dinner time, then a full meal is usually expected.** Shorter parties taking place between meal times don't require full meals, but snacks should still be provided to make the event hospitable!

The cake should be picked up a few hours prior to the party and should also be **kept in a safe place** – away from edges of tables and away from curious pets (it has happened, trust me...)

You can call a few days ahead to pizza joints to plan an order and have them deliver it at a certain time. Calling a few hours prior to the party to confirm is always a good idea.

Tip: allergies are becoming more and more common. You should ask parents about possible allergies *before* the party. Nine foods cause 90% of food allergic reactions: cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, soy, fish, shellfish and wheat. Be aware of what you serve!

Turn Food into an Activity!

I performed at a party with a great structure! For the first 30 minutes of the party, while kids were still arriving, each child was given an uncooked, personal panned pizza along with toppings. Each child could decorate their mini pizza with toppings however they wanted! Afterwards, I performed a magic show for the guests while the pizzas were cooking. By the end of the show, all the pizzas were cooked and lunch was served! Each child loved eating their own creation!



Party Supplies

Balloons, room decorations, piñata, and party hats!

It's not a party without your party supplies. Many party supplies can be used year after year, but you can also purchase new supplies to match the theme. It's up to you! A trip to your local party store will give you good ideas of which supplies will be perfect for your party!



Don't overlook the small stuff either: plates, cups, napkins, utensils, tablecloths, and candles – all necessary for a successful party (and a mess-free meal).

Ah yes, party favors: cheap plastic items that will be used once and then thrown away... but they are a necessity! Kids love them and that will become obvious on the party day. It's not a party without party favors. Don't throw all the party favors in the take-home gift bag! Some party favors can be utilized during the party itself to add some fun! Noisemakers, stickers, bubbles, inflatables, and more! Along with checking out a party store, you can bulk order party favors at orientaltrading.com.

Party Day

Whew! You *finally* made it to the party day. Time for all your hard work to pay off!

Just remember **you can't do it alone**. It's best to recruit help from others: older siblings, your spouse, or another parent. Just make sure to ask them *ahead* of time!

Presents can be opened during or after the party. Kids like to see their presents being opened, so opening presents during the party is a good way to add excitement – just make sure the kids don't get *too* excited over the presents. Don't forget to teach your child to say "thank you!"

Just because you're the party planner doesn't mean you can't enjoy the party! Don't forget to take pictures, because after all, birthdays only happen once a year (Thank goodness you'll have another year to relax before doing it all over again!).

Enjoy yourself and let the guests enjoy themselves.

That's the *real* secret to a successful party.



Relax! Kids don't need a fully structured party to have fun! Kids make their own fun anyways! If kids are still having fun with one activity, don't rush them just to get to the next activity!

Expect the Unexpected

Even if you're Martha Stewart, no children's party will go without a hiccup or two. Whether it's bad weather, a child getting hurt, or a bad case of the hiccups (yes, I've seen it), **planning ahead will make the party move smoothly.**



If your party takes place away from home, **remember to bring more than you think you'll need!** Sometimes a few extra siblings will show up (nobody wants to go to a party and have it run out of food before everyone's served!). If physical activities are involved, bring a small first aid kit (band-aids make any "wound" feel better!), ice, and parents' contact information.

Weather can be your best friend or your worst enemy on the party day. Check the weather report the days leading up to the party so that you can prepare! If it's supposed to rain the day of your outdoor party, better clean up your house quickly and call all the parents (and inform any entertainment).

Go with the flow. Many party factors will be out of your control, so you must work with what you're given. A small snowstorm closes the community center? Why not tell parents to dress their kids warmly and walk to your house! Kids will play in the snow while parents enjoy the warmth of your house!

Party Planning Timeline

6 weeks before—plan the date and location.
Rent party space.

4 weeks before—plan theme. Order any party supplies or activities to ensure they arrive on time. Research and hire an entertainer.

3 weeks before—plan guest list and send out invitations.

1 week before—plan activity schedule and buy any remaining supplies. Order cake.

3 days before—check weather forecast and RSVPs to prepare for party.

2 days before—purchase party foods and contact pizza place about order.

1 day before—bake cake and decorate house.
Prepare food.

Party!

About the Author

Drew “Blue Shoes” Kennerley is a magician who has performed at hundreds of children’s birthday parties around the Washington DC area. After working with many nervous mothers, Drew decided to write this ebook to help mothers through the complicated party-planning process. Drew has included time-



tested techniques as well as some personal ideas Drew has noticed through his experiences as a children’s party magician.

You can learn more about Drew at www.DrewBlueShoes.com