

FOOD-O-GRAM

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Planning for a birthday bash!

tutorials through pictures as well as videos.

ENLISTING HELPERS

You can't greet guests while supervising a game or cut the cake while pouring drinks, so plan on having one helper for every four to six children. Ask other parents ahead of time, your husband or older sibling to help.

PLANNING A PARTY AT HOME

The birthday girl/boy is on his own turf, and you know where to find everything. To keep

give a teacup for a tea party, an action figure for a character party, or flowerpot and seeds for a garden party.

Let kids make their own party favours -- a potato-print T-shirt, for example -- as one of the activities.

Decorate with items that guests can take with them when the party is done, such as posters or pennants for a baseball party. Arrange with the entertainer to use props or supplies - individual face-painting kits or

Stick to games they know well or activities without complicated rules (such as dancing or borof-pani).

Older kids need more stimulation: plan sports or organised activities based on what your child loves to do, or consider booking an entertainer.

LIVE BY THIS TIMELINE

6 weeks before: Choose the theme, draw up the guest list, confirm the date with your child's best friend, and reserve off-site space.

Planning a child's birthday is more fun than you know. Yes, it can be exhausting; you might have to stretch your mind beyond the everyday balloon and streamers, you might have to get your hands dirty with glue, cut lots of paper or take the easy way out and hire a party planner; I'd suggest you do it yourself at least once.

Planning the party is half the fun, seeing your ideas coming to life is exhilarating! Deciding on the theme, decorations, and activities makes the days leading up to the event seem like part of the celebration itself. It doesn't need to be complex; kids will be happy with a small party as long as they are made to feel special. Even a simple party requires planning; the sooner you start organising, the earlier the thrill begins and the fewer details you'll have to deal with on the day itself.

The birthday girl/boy will likely have ideas about the kind of party s/he wants, so make sure your child is involved in the planning. Let him/her pick the theme, this will help you with the shopping and decorating, and take part in baking the cake (if you are baking it at home). Doing so helps spread out the anticipation; that way the focus isn't on a couple of hours of a single day.

WHO TO INVITE

Ask your child! They have a list already in their mind about who they want at the



party. Trust me! I've had many birthday parties with many people I didn't want there. My little 3 year old nephew made it very clear who he wants at his party, they have favourites too.

LEARN TO MAKE HOMEMADE DECORATIONS

Sometimes making the decorations yourself is very rewarding. You can get your children, family or extended family to get in on the fun. Learn from Youtube or Pinterest (I find this most helpful). They have step by step



kids from wandering around, define the party area with balloons and streamers, and closed doors to other rooms.

WHEN AND HOW LONG TO HAVE IT

Schedule parties for young children when they will be at their best, neither too sleepy nor too hungry. After nap time works well for toddlers; lunchtime is good for pre-schoolers. As kids grow older, timing becomes a less important factor.

DURATION

Don't feel like you have to entertain for hours. Toddlers and preschoolers do best with parties kept to an hour and a half. Anywhere from two to three hours is time enough for school-age kids.

CHOOSING FAVOURS

Trinkets and candy are popular and inexpensive favours. If you prefer, you can give out a single more substantial favour, such as a board book for toddlers or a small flashlight for older kids.

TIP

Match the goodies to the theme: you might



magic tricks, for instance - that kids can then take home with them.

WHAT TO DO

Pacing is important. It's helpful to divide the party into 10 to 15 minute increments, with a new activity for each block of time. Allot about 30 minutes for an entertainer (or kids may lose interest), and 15 minutes each for lunch, cake, and opening gifts. If a game or craft isn't going well, drop it and move on; if kids enjoy a particular game, let it run longer than planned. To keep the party moving, jot down the schedule on an index card, and then refer to it frequently.

As kids arrive, you might usher them to a crafts table, where they can busy themselves until more guests arrive.

Keep games and activities simple for toddlers;

4 weeks before: Write out invitations; get updated class list; and decide on games, activities, and food.

3 weeks before: Ask your child to give out invitations in class, purchase party goods, start homemade decorations and favours, and arrange for extra help, if needed.

1 to 2 weeks before: Purchase craft supplies and favours, draw up a schedule of activities, make samples of planned crafts, and call guests who have not yet responded.

3 days before: Buy food.

1 to 2 days before: Bake the cake, decorate your home or be sure off-site supplies are gathered, and prepare make-ahead foods.

Photo courtesy: The Party Poppers
For relevant recipes flip to page 14

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