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By: Martine Goodman

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About the Author

Martine Goodman has been organizing and attending children's parties for many years as a guest, parent, and grandparent.

She has seen costs soar and been surprised that many parties have become even more lavish at the same time.

Martine wrote her book to give her readers simple ways to provide their children with memorable and highly enjoyable parties without great costs or lots of effort.

She said that the secret is focusing the party on the birthday child and their friends and taking each stage of the party a step at a time.

Martine has consulted her friends and family for their experiences, both good and bad.

She put everything she has learned about making children's parties fun for everyone, including the parents, into this ebook.

"I hope that my book will help parents avoid the errors and make every party a wonderful, low-cost and highly enjoyable event to remember."

Introduction

Birthday parties and other celebrations are likely to become some of your child's favorite memories in later life if they're the sort of party you aim to have.

I've written this guide, based on years of experience, to help you produce your next party and every one after that with maximum enjoyment, while keeping costs and stress low.

I have concentrated on birthday parties, but most of the information and suggestions here can also be applied with a little imagination to other events too.

This book will give you a simple plan to cover almost everything which you need to be prepared before your party, and how to wind it up so that your guests are looking forward to the next one.

I've included information and resources that I have found helpful for the parties I have been involved with.

I've organized many parties and also learned many good ideas and some warnings from the experiences of my friends and family members.

All the important stuff is in this book.

Happy reading and wonderful parties!

Always Remember - It's for the Children



A lot of parents remember disappointments which they had when they were children. Their parents were unable or unwilling to give them some of the treats which some of their friends received.

When they have their own children, they feel a great need to ensure that their children don't miss out on those things which they did.

In effect, they deal with their own regrets by providing the most that they can for their children.

They focus on themselves instead of focusing on the children.

This can be taken too far. It can cause the child to develop unrealistic expectations which may lead to disappointments in later life when the parents are not there to keep providing for them.

It can also put pressure on parents of their friends to provide similar experiences with the parties which they hold.

Always keep the focus on the birthday child.

It's a great idea to involve them in the planning of and preparation for the event.

The whole experience can be valuable for building their confidence and improving their social skills.

By going to their friend's parties and having them at their home for their own party, the child will get some experience of:

- Giving and receiving gifts. It's natural for children to speak their feelings, so they might say, "I hate that toy!" or whatever.
- Winning and losing.
- Being part of a team.
- Just sitting while they watch others have a moment in the spotlight.

Some of these experiences may upset some children.

If you think this might happen with your child, you might decide to discuss with them the best ways to handle these things before the occasion occurs.

You could also possibly look for opportunities in news and sports programs where you can point out good examples of appropriate behavior.

Is this Party Really Necessary?

The first thing to decide is whether to actually have the party.

Although every birthday is an important milestone for your child and the whole family, organizing and paying for a party for each child every year can be stressful and costly.

It is not really necessary. Many parents have a party every couple of years and celebrate the children's birthdays in the other years with a family trip or other event that marks the day but is less demanding to prepare and easier on their finances. Proud parents want to have a party for their children's first birthday but the child is not likely to appreciate the trappings of the event. It is really too young.

A very young child will not understand the concept of sharing its toys or anything else.

In those first couple of years, I suggest that you have a low key celebration with just some family members and their children.

When the child starts preschool, he or she will start to develop social skills through interaction with other children.

That will be the time when they will start to appreciate the party and playing with their friends in their own home.

Planning Your Child's Party

The old maxim that "people who fail to plan, plan to fail" is true for parties as it is with life generally.

A plan or road map for your party is essential. Without it, you are guaranteed to spend more time, energy and money than you need to.

I will provide you with check-lists that you can adapt to more closely suit your own circumstances and plans.

The lists will get you over the initial slow and boring stage of trying to think of what items you want and need to list.

Just adapt these lists and print them up.

But, of course, no plan will fit every reader exactly or be able to prevent every possible problem.

Timing

The timing of your party will have a major influence on its success.

If you want to get the best attendance, make sure that it does not occur during school holidays or clash with major holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving or Christmas.

You might arrange it for early evening if you find that you or the other parents are heavily committed each weekend. This will not work if you and your partner work and have to commute each working day.

You will also need to check if it might clash with any very popular after-school activity or sport event.

What day you choose for your party will also be important.

Most children's parties which are held on weekends happen in the afternoon and start at 1 p.m. or no later than 2 p.m.

But, some people have had successful, well-attended parties on Saturday mornings.

It all depends on what suits you and the other parents.

Then, you need to decide how long the party will be?

Some parents plan for their party to run for more than 2 hours but that, in my experience, puts a lot more pressure on them and also on the children.

Most children have a fairly short attention span, so they need a variety of things to maintain their interest and enthusiasm – just ask any teacher!

Younger children also tire fairly easily.

So, it's better to have an hour and a half filled with interest and surprises than three hours where the children become tired and restless.

Theme for Your Party

Some parties are set up and run with all the focus on the birthday and everybody has a great time.

Many parties have a theme which is based on a special interest of the birthday child. This can give the event a special flavor and mark it as different from other birthday parties which the children attend.

Themes can be based on: The child's favorite book or television program, traditional interests like fairies, dinosaurs or pirates, a craft like scrapbooking or T-shirt painting, or entertainment such as clowning, magic or face painting. These are especially good when you have hired that type of entertainment.

We can break the main sections of the party down to these sections:

Welcoming The Guests

Games

Entertainment

Feeding The Guests

Cutting The Cake

Finishing Up

The plan must cover all of the preparations, the party itself, and also finishing up afterwards.

Careful pre-party preparation is vital to ensure that the party runs as smoothly as possible and that all of the guests and the adult helpers enjoy the experience.

It's important to ensure that your child enjoys the party, but it is equally important that everybody present has a good experience too.

Get the Pictures You Want

Parties involve a lot of effort but one of the rewards are the pictures which we get of our children, their friends and ourselves having fun – great memories which will can review in later years.

I hope these suggestions will help you to get the best pictures possible because the moments don't last.

I always ask any parent or relative that's coming to bring their camera because I can't be everywhere and they sometimes get a wonderful picture of my own child when I'm somewhere else.

A friend goes one better. She gives each parent who stays to help a disposable camera if they didn't bring their own.

Of course, digital cameras are making things much easier so long as the owner remembers the batteries and to clear plenty of space on the memory cards.

The main requirement is to get some practise with whatever camera you will use before the day of the party.

Every brand and type of camera has its own characteristics. The features of the cameras are improving as rapidly as the prices have been dropping.

So, I can't tell you how to best use your particular camera.

But, here are my best tips I've been given or learned from previous mistakes.

1] The best tip ever was from a professional photographer at her own child's party. She said that photographers should always get down to the child's eye level. That's where most of the fun and action is!





2] You want your pictures to show as best you can the liveliness and fun that you all enjoyed. The best way is to catch the children doing something that is fun, not just stiffly posing with plastic smiles. They'll do enough of that at business functions when they

are adults!

3] Forget the background. Get in close, so that the person looking at your picture almost feels they are there and part of the group in the photo.

4] Fade into the background yourself. I guarantee you'll get better pictures that just happen compared to those you carefully set up.

5] If you have an experienced photographer among your relatives or the parents, ask them if they will concentrate on taking photos? All the enthusiasm in the world cannot guarantee good pictures. Someone with a child at the party that also has photographic skills starts a street ahead. You and other adults may get some great pictures too because no photographer can be everywhere at once.

6] Artificial light can change the color in your party pictures. If your camera has settings for white balance (check the manual), do some experimenting before the party starts with the same lighting at about the same time of day.

7] Although I think that candid, un-posed pictures are usually better, you should take a couple of pictures of the whole group to copy and share with everyone present and probably a couple more of the family members to send to relatives who could not get to the party.

8] If you have any sort of nervous shake and think that might affect the pictures you take, use a mini-tripod or take a deep breath just before you gently squeeze the button.

9] Give the photographers some advance warning about when the important items will occur. No-one wants to be changing their batteries or loading a new film when the birthday child is cutting the cake!

10] If you make a video of the party, you can get single frames copied and printed as photos.

11] Turn your camera through 90 degrees, so one end is pointing to the floor. These portrait style pictures will cut away a lot of un-necessary distractions from the sides and focus the viewer's eyes on the person or people you were aiming at.

You can gather a group of your best pictures (include any you get from other guests and family members) and make a slideshow or screensaver for your computer.

You can get the free Irfanview program to make a slideshow which can be shown on any Windows based computer from

http://www.irfanview.com/main_download_engl.htm

I have used Irfanview and been very happy with it.

I have not made screensavers but you might check download.cnet.com/ for free screensaver making programs

Invitations

Who to invite?

In those first couple of years, I suggest you have a low key celebration with some family members and their children.

When the child starts preschool, he or she will start to develop an awareness of social interaction with other children.

Inviting everyone in their class might be unwise, even if you have the budget and facilities to handle that many children and their varied needs.

If the whole class comes, it might be difficult to avoid transferring any tensions which have developed among the group in the school environment to your place. You don't need that!

You can be sure some guests who have confirmed will not arrive and some extra children are likely to be brought along.

If you have booked and paid for a venue but only half the expected number arrive, you may have to pay the extra cost yourself!

Sometimes, there are good unexpected reasons for not showing up but some people either forget or double-book themselves for that day.

As they progress through their school years, your child will have some special school friends and you will probably let them invite some to their party.

They will probably play with several others on a fairly regular basis but inviting everyone that plays with them to a party would probably be too much hassle and expensive.

Some people use the age of the child plus one for the number of children to invite. For your first party, that is probably as good a measure to start with.

If that number seems small, remember that you will have some parents as well. There could also be a few siblings or other children who are brought along by some of the parents.

When you have a successful party or two completed, you can always boost the numbers by more than one child per year if you are comfortable with doing that.

My experience is that small parties can be as much or even more fun than large ones. Your children and the children and parents that make the effort to come are the ones who you should focus on.

The children will probably enjoy having more time with their best friends than they probably get without the other distractions of their school day.

A small group is also the best way to get to know the other children much better.

Don't let no shows spoil your "show" or your day!

You must decide whether you want the parents to just drop off their children and pick them up at the specified time when the party is due to finish or whether you will provide them something to eat and drink while they hopefully help with keeping the children amused and safe.

Writing the Invitation

Keep the invitation informal. You might let your child decorate it.

Be careful that you don't get so hassled that you accidentally forget to include some of the most important information for your guests.

Put the name(s) of the child(ren) you're inviting and the name and age of the birthday child.

They also need the time and date when your party starts, how to get to your house or the location of the party (draw a map and include it with the invitation) and your mobile and landline phone numbers.

Giving the parents an email address is probably a good idea. You can set up one with Hotmail or a similar service just for the party if you don't want to spread your personal addresses too widely.

Give them your postal address, phone numbers, and email address for replies. Don't just put RSVP. Some people won't know what the term means.

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