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Kids Party Etiquette for Parents

By Patricia B. Jensen

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INVITATIONS

The rule of thumb passed down by experienced Moms and Dads is to invite the same number of party guests as your child's age. Resist the temptation to invite every child in your child's classroom. Be discrete and avoid hurt feelings by mailing invitations home instead of passing them out in school. A manageable party is a more enjoyable one both for the party attendants and for you!

PARTY TIME AND DURATION

An hour is sufficient for toddlers and pre-schoolers when naptimes are still an issue. Plan your party when the birthday child will be freshest and best able to handle all the excitement, perhaps a morning brunch is best.

For older school age children, a two to three hour party at any time of day is a safe bet; evening parties and sleep-overs are popular options for pre-teens.

RSVPs

Always include an RSVP date and phone number on your party invitations. In the event of a guest failing to RSVP, a cordial call on or after your RSVP date is perfectly acceptable. Sometimes mail is delayed and other mishaps occur, and you need to be sure that the invitation was received. In addition, knowing the exact guest count is necessary for planning purposes.

GIFT GAFFES

Children may sometimes express their true, and not necessarily polite, feelings about a gift they have received. In advance of the party, explain to your child that it's necessary to thank all the gift-givers

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with equal enthusiasm, no matter what the gift. Impress upon your him or her that each guest feels their gift is special, and that it's the thought behind it that counts.

If you plan to open gifts at the party, make it early before kids are tired, cranky and hyped with sugar. Of course, this issue can be avoided entirely by opening the gifts after guests have departed, a time-saving practice which prevents the embarrassment of the party child making ungrateful comments.

COMPETITIVE GAMES

There's nothing wrong with good old-fashioned competition; it gets the adrenalin going and cranks up the excitement. Just make sure that the elements of each game are manageable for the age group you are inviting. A trial run with the party child prior to the party will likely head off any problems.

In addition, small gifts such as a lollipop or small trinket given to every player for completing the game is preferable to awarding one large prize to the winner only. Planning a craft activity or end-of-party reading time will involve all the guests, even the quieter ones.

SIBLINGS SHOWING UP UNINVITED

Be very clear on your party invitation by using the name of the guest invited. Some people will ignore the obvious and do what's convenient for them anyway, so have a few extra goodie bags on hand for siblings who just show up.

BACK-UP PLANS

If you're having an outdoor party, it's good common sense to have a rainy day alternative. Confirm your entertainer one week before party time, but prepare a handful of games you can orchestrate on your own, if necessary. If a guest or two are late for the festivities, don't delay your schedule but keep on as planned. Although no-shows, delays, and inclement weather are party bummers, you can still pull it off like professional with a little advance preparation.

PARTY CHILD MISBEHAVING

Here's where some advance coaching is in order. Emphasize the important role your child has as the party host or hostess to make guests feel comfortable. Discuss the responsibilities s/he will have such as greeting the guests, showing them where to sit at the party table, and handing out party favors.

Stress that through helping others enjoy the day, your child will likely have a better time too. A gentle reminder during the party should be all that's needed once you've laid down the ground rules.

GUESTS MISBEHAVING

The party excitement, coupled with sugar intake, can lead to tantrums, tears, and other misbehavior. Step back a moment and try to handle these problems with patience and diplomacy. A little attention

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and redirection is sometimes all that's needed to remedy the situation. Give the child a special job to do or make them an honorary party helper.

If the behavior escalates, don't be afraid to separate the child to a quiet room. Explain that bad behavior will not be tolerated and that the parents will be called to take him or her home if it continues.

DUPLICATE GIFT DILEMMA

If there's a gift receipt attached from a thoughtful parent, you're golden. Otherwise, don't get into it with another parent unless you can do so without causing offense. You can try just returning the gift for store credit, if you know where it was purchased. Or, stash it away with the name of the original gift-giver taped to it. This way you can recycle the gift, making sure it goes to an entirely new (and hopefully appreciative) child.

THANK YOU NOTES

Thank you notes are an excellent way to promote good manners and appreciation in your children. Not only are they important social skill builders, they foster good writing and creativity as well. Kids will

learn to enjoy writing thank you cards if you make it a fun project by using colorful note cards and glittery gel pens or let them design their own on the computer.

For younger children, it's okay for the parent to write the note and have the party child sign it. The party child could even draw a picture which Mom or Dad can copy and send as a thank you. The "fill-in-the-blanks" type thank you note are a great alternative too. Another super idea is to include a picture of the guest taken with the party child along with the thank you note.

Incidentally, it's critical to keep a careful list of who-gave-what so thank you notes can be sent without mix-ups.

CAN PARENTS STAY?

If you're unsure if you can accompany your child to a party, just be up front with the parents beforehand and ask what their party plans are. The RSVP call is a great time to ask questions. Most parents of younger children know some kids are more comfortable with their parents around and plan accordingly. (A pot of coffee and extra cake or munchies for the adults.) Most parents will offer to help if they stay an extra bonus for the host/hostess!

Patricia B. Jensen is a mother of three and kids party enthusiast. She is the webmaster and owner of – a comprehensive resource for kids party ideas and complete party plans for many popular themes, including invitations, cakes, decorations, games, costumes, favors, and food.

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Children Birthday Party Advice

By George Meszaros

Birthday parties for children are exciting events. To make a thrilling experience for the children, we must work hard. Careful planning is essential.

The younger the participants the less structure you need to worry about. The younger the kids, the more relaxed they will be. Keeping it simple is important. Kids can entertain each other better than adults, so you don't need to worry about too much structure. Minimal structure does not mean minimal parental supervision. A successful children party's most important component is responsible adult supervision.

Planning the Party

Before you buy anything, you must set your budget. Don't spend a dime before you set a budget. Your budget will determine many things such as the food, how many you can invite, entertainment, etc. Set the theme of the party before you go out for shopping for the party. The number and age of kids will determine what kind of games you should consider. Games are no an absolute must, but it may help with some of the older kids. Choosing the proper location is an important success factor. Kids need lots of space; they don't like to sit around, so you have to give them space. Most importantly the location must be safe, and it must be large enough to accommodate your guests. A party at someone's house is fine, as long as it meets your requirements.

The Checklist

Make sure you don't leave home without a checklist. Shopping by a checklist will enable you to only buy what is necessary. In addition, it helps to avoid impulse buying. You should have a list including everything important for your party. Such a list can help you relax, because you don't have to worry about remembering everything. Your list should include items such the cake, party favors, ice cream, games, etc. Depending on the particular party you may not need a long list, but make sure you have one.

Invitations

Depending on the kind of party you are planning, formal invitations may be necessary. Make sure you send invitations at least two–three weeks prior to the party date, to allow parents planning and buying gifts. Using e–mail to notify the parents may save you a lot of time instead of mailing invitations. Always

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offer an RSVP so you know how many children and parents to expect for the party.

Games, Favors, & Activities

The number and kind of games you have at the party depends on the age of the kids and the location of the party. You don't have to worry about games for a beach party as a party held at someone's house during the winter. As much as you can, get the children involved with the planning. The more involved they are in the planning the more they will enjoy the party

Now that you have some birthday planning advice, get planning.

George Meszaros with

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