

# How To Plan A Home Birthday Party

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Having worked as a part-time children's entertainer for the last 20 years and performed at over 1,000 birthday parties in people's homes, I have seen it all. From intimate events to extravagant affairs, birthday parties can be lots of fun for everyone. But if you have never planned one, where do you start? Funny you should ask. Here are some ideas that will help make your party special without breaking the bank. If you follow a few guidelines it will be a piece of cake.

## **DATE & TIME**

The first thing you need to decide on is a date and time. Most people want to have their birthday party on a weekend afternoon. This is a good time for a party, but many times it interferes with other activities such as soccer games, family outings, other birthday parties, etc. Also, the best entertainers usually fill their weekend schedules first. If you want to have the party on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, plan as far in advance as you can.

Saturday mornings are becoming more popular because that time interferes with fewer activities, and when the party is over, the rest of the day is free. Weekdays, however, are becoming the most popular party days. Weekday parties are not only a great way to break up the week, but also leave your weekends free for other activities.

Plan a few dates that you would like to have the party. Check your child's activity schedule to be sure it doesn't interfere with the party. Also make sure most of your child's friends can make it to the party. Call the entertainer you want at the party and check their schedule and decide on a date and time (see Entertainment below).

## **PARTY LENGTH**

The typical birthday party lasts two hours. If you plan on fifteen minutes at the beginning of the party for late arrivals and 40-45 minutes for birthday cake and opening presents, that leaves a full hour you must fill with other activities and entertainment. If your party is three hours long, you will need to fill two hours.

## **DECIDE ON A THEME**

You don't need a theme, but it will often help make planning easier. If your daughter's favorite things at the moment are Dalmatians, theme the party around them. If your son's passion is Harry Potter, you have your theme. Others use baseball, soccer, football, ballet, dinosaurs, Cinderella, etc.

Many people will theme their parties around the entertainment they have planned. For example, a magician will be performing so the theme is MAGIC, a clown is coming to the party so a CLOWN theme is planned, etc.

As far as themes go, don't worry that absolutely everything at the party must fit the theme. A few decorations are fine, a cake is great, but there is no need to stress-out because you can't find an entertainer that does a Star Wars show to fit your theme. Remember that a party should be fun for everyone, including the planner.

## **DECORATIONS**

When it comes to decorating, all you need to find are Dalmatian party items. You don't need to have everything "Dalmatian" either. A few major items are fine; the rest of the decorations can be black and white to match the Dalmatian's colors.

There are several party stores around that carry many different themes, call and ask if they have items that will fit your theme. You can also visit a website like [www.afterthelaughter.com](http://www.afterthelaughter.com) that will give you ideas. And remember you don't need to go overboard. A few strategically placed decorations are often better than every square foot covered in color.

## **INVITATIONS**

This is a place where your theme should begin. Dalmatian invitations will let everyone know the theme before they even get to the party. It is also a subtle suggestion of gift ideas for those who don't have any idea what to get. Make sure you get the invitations out a minimum of two weeks before the party to give parents time to plan.

## **FOOD**

If the party is scheduled during or close to lunch or dinner, serving food is essential. During a party the children are usually having so much fun with each other that serving a "normal" meal is not only unnecessary, but also unneeded. The children want to get back to the party activities as soon as possible; so pizza, pigs in a blanket, or sandwiches and chips are usually perfect.

## **CAKE**

Here is an area where you have lots of options. You can have a cake decorated and shaped to go with your theme, or a traditional cake just using the theme colors. You can have cake and ice cream or an ice cream cake. This is an area where your creativity can really come out. I have been to almost 1,000 birthday parties and I have seen some amazing cakes.

I once saw a Star Wars cake with a sculpture of R2D2 made of white chocolate on top. There was the "Magic" cake shaped like a rabbit coming out of a top hat. Then there was the cake that looked like a construction site complete with dump trucks and bulldozers. There was even a cake with a photo of me printed on the frosting! Use your imagination and have fun.

A great idea that is gaining popularity is to have the cake at the party; the child blows out the candles, then the cake is put aside and the children are served cupcakes. Kids love them, they are easier to serve, and you will have a lovely cake for an intimate family celebration of the child's birthday.

## **GOODIE BAGS**

There used to be a day when the birthday child was the only one who received gifts, but those days are long gone. These days goodie bags are a must, and sometimes it can be the most difficult part of putting together the party. The bags may carry the theme, but they don't need to. Goodie bags are something the children take home to remind them how much fun they had at the party, so be sure the items inside are fun too! You don't need to overdo it either; a few inexpensive fun items are often better than a bag full of expensive gifts. Remember that the party is for the birthday child, not the guests.

## **GAMES & ACTIVITIES**

You will almost always need to plan at least one for the party, even if you have an entertainer coming. Activities can range from coloring with crayons to a Ferris Wheel in your backyard. Don't deluge the kids with activities, but make sure there is enough for them to do so they aren't just running around the house.

## **ENTERTAINMENT**

I left entertainment for last in the article, but if you decide to hire entertainment for your party, do that first! The best entertainers are booked far in advance, so if you send out the invitations and then call the entertainers, you may not be able to get them on the date and time you need.

Entertainment seldom matches your party theme unless you theme the party around the entertainer or hire a costumed character. Don't worry so much about the entertainment matching your theme; be more concerned with making sure the children are entertained. There are a variety of birthday party entertainers out there with a wide range of prices.

The best way to find a quality entertainer is to ask around. Talk to friends, other parents, your child's school or childcare center, etc. If your child comes home from a party raving about how funny the performer was, find out who it was. Ask your child if they want that performer to come to their birthday party.

If you didn't have any luck finding entertainers through referrals, look in your local family-type publication in their "party" section. There are more choices there than you could ever call. Find a few ads that catch your attention and seem to be the kind of entertainment you need. Call them starting with the one that caught your eye first and work your way down the list. You should be able to find what you're looking for in two or three calls.

When calling, there are several things you need ask. What age group is their show most suited for? What do they do in their show? What does their package include? Do they do balloon animals? How long is their performance? How much experience do they have? Do they have references? What do they charge? Do they accept credit cards? What are the payment arrangements? The answers to these questions will help you decide which entertainer is right for you.

I hope these suggestions will help you in planning your next home birthday party. If you have any questions at all, please call John Anderson at (321) 728-1858 or visit the website [www.afterthelaughter.com](http://www.afterthelaughter.com)



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