

# How to Make Birthday Memories That Will Last a Lifetime



Twelve Steps for Party Planning, Party Games  
and a Party To Do List

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That ever so special time of year, your child's birthday is rapidly approaching and you're at a loss. I hope that this handy party planning guide offers some useful tips. I want you to be able to kick back and enjoy adding some of the most wonderful memories of your life.

The birthday party planning process is a wonderful opportunity to bond with your children. It is also the perfect time to begin teaching your children, no matter how young, the styles, obligations and etiquette of hosting a social function. The planning process encourages each child to weigh options, make informed choices, explore budgeting and learn sound social behavior. What I'm suggesting is to make each party a full family project.

## Quick Tips

1. Plan your live entertainment to arrive about 30 minutes after your party starts. This way, if anyone is running late, they will still arrive in time to see the most memorable show.
2. Set the room temperature cooler than usual. A room full of children will increase the room temperature and can make some kids grumpy.
3. Turn off any TV's, radios, etc. during the show.
4. Pre-light the candles! They will re-light easier when it is time, will be easier for your child to blow out and you will already have your lighter or matches ready near the cake.
5. Ready? Action! Where's the camera? Check your camera/phone is charged and ready. And, don't forget to take a picture of the cake!
6. Have a cleared area for the children to sit and watch the show.
7. Remove pets from the performance area as they can be a distraction.
8. Put some balloons on the mailbox so guests can easily find your home.
9. Save snacks and party favors until after the show. Children need their hands free to participate.
10. Get then get ready for a Fun, Exciting and Memorable Party!

Here are twelve steps that should help make your child's birthday a fantastic day that your whole family will remember for a lifetime. I've even included games to play while children are arriving and a To Do list. You may not need to use all of these tips. These are just things I've noticed while performing at birthdays.

## **STEP 1 – MAKE IT FUN!**

Memorize this first step and refer back to it often as the date approaches. You're planning a child's party...not an international peace conference. The world really isn't going to end if a game falls flat or the cake comes out hot pink instead of NASCAR Red. The kids will certainly be having too much fun to notice. Concentrate on having fun and building wonderful memories.

## **STEP 2 – Keep it Personal!**

Don't allow your busy schedule to get in the way of your personal involvement with your child's party. Nothing says "I Love You" louder than giving your children the close personal attention they crave. Don't think that using a professional party planning service will carry the same impact. You may end up with the perfect social event of the season, but your child may only see that you didn't have time for him or her. Give your child the most precious gift you possess...your time...before the opportunity passes you by.

## **STEP 3 – Pick a Theme!**

Sit down and discuss potential themes with your child. Does the child have a specific all-consuming interest? Some examples that come to mind are famous Disney characters, super heroes, pirates, jungle fantasies, dress-up and princess-for-a-day. Encourage your child to use their creativity to invent their own.

## **STEP 4 – Recruit the Family!**

Siblings, younger and older, often feel left out at these parties. Include them in the planning process and encourage them to contribute their ideas and creativity. Allow the older siblings to invite a special friend and enlist them both as waiters, guest greeters or game coordinators. Enlist younger siblings as "Keeper of the Gifts" or "Guardian of the Cake" with an appropriate cardboard and foil medallion attached to a neck ribbon denoting the high official duty. Assign siblings the task of selecting the perfect birthday gift or designing the ideal birthday cake or party décor. Keep in mind that birthdays are a celebration of the family!

## **STEP 5 – Select a Party Location!**

Most of the parties I have the privilege of performing at take place in the birthday child's home, but you have some other choices too. Country clubs, housing communities, libraries, and community centers all have rooms to rent. These rooms can give you LOTS of space to play games and have a performer. Outside parties have several disadvantages. During the summer it can get too hot or it can rain. And, the most important thing you have to think about is that you are responsible for all the children at your party. You wouldn't want a child

to get lost or hurt. However, it's fairly easy to keep up with all the children at a back yard party. Just be sure and have some "emergency" activities planned in case of rain.

## **STEP 6 – Reserve the Entertainment!**

Reserve early if you're planning on hiring live entertainment, a bounce house, pony rides or a cotton candy machine for the party. The most reliable and skilled services are often booked weeks in advance. If you have a particular service or entertainer in mind, you may have to adjust your date or time to fit a busy entertainer's schedule. A good rule of thumb is to reserve entertainment at least 4-6 weeks in advance. A professional entertainer can be a bit expensive, but the best ones add a special glow to your party. This is a feature that Uncle Billy in a red nose and rainbow wig just can't match.

Rely on word of mouth from friends and family to find the best entertainers. References will help, but don't expect the entertainer to give you anything but the most glowing responses to his or her work. If you have no referral, ask the entertainer for a video or if he or she is appearing anywhere that you might be able to watch them perform before confirming your event.

You should also ask for specifics regarding the service. What services does he or she provide for the fee? Please keep in mind that the best children's entertainers are generally sole operators...that is, they can't be reached through booking agents or "entertainment groups".

*A NOTE ON LIVE ENTERTAINMENT ETIQUETTE* – All too often, the professional entertainer is tasked as chief babysitter and child care specialist. Remember that the entertainer is there as a source of laughter...not discipline. Please stay available to provide a controlling influence over the children. Ask adults to respect the children and the entertainer by keeping their conversations low and away from the entertainment spot. All too often unintentional adult chatter in the background diminishes the impact of the entertainment. Children learn respect for others through observation.

*A NOTE ON LIVE ANIMAL & INFLATABLE AMUSEMENTS* – Pony rides and inflatable rentals, such as bounce houses and slides, are plentiful and relatively affordable for private parties. For your protection, always ask for documented proof of liability insurance coverage and city or state licensing. The rental agency should provide you with a valid copy of their insurance coverage. Liability coverage starting at \$1,000,000 per incident is the industry standard. If the agency is not insured or cannot provide you with proof of insurance and licensing, you may find yourself personally liable for any injuries or fines resulting from the use of the animals or the inflatables. Hiring a dedicated professional may cost a bit more, but the peace of mind that comes from their experience and concern is worth it.

## **STEP 7 – Set the Date!**

Once you have the vital reservations resolved, you can confirm the date and time of your party. Plan the party on a date that is convenient to your family's schedule. Weekends are better if you are asking for help from others. Don't worry about hosting the party on the actual birth date. Parents tend to worry about this much more than the children. Check, as much as possible, to be sure that no major events, such as state or local fairs, festivals, major sports events, etc, are happening in the vicinity of your party.

## **STEP 8 – Prepare the Guest List!**

Ask your child whom they want to invite. Keep in mind that supervision is largely your responsibility as the hosting adult. Don't let that list get too large unless you know you will have the support to handle the larger group. Fifteen-twenty kids is a good size for a party. If there are more children than that, they won't be able to get the individual attention they need. Be sure to include at least one adult or parent for every three children younger than 5 years.

## **STEP 9 – Send the Invitations!**

Invitations can be store bought or handmade. If each guest has internet access, you can send great free electronic invitations through [www.hallmark.com](http://www.hallmark.com). With the growth in popularity of home publishing software like *PrintMaster* or *Print Shop*, you and your child can design great personalized invitations right at home. The key is to be creative and have fun! Send invitations at least two to three weeks in advance of the party date. Any earlier and the invitations are likely to be lost or forgotten. Any later and parents may have already made conflicting plans. It is always wise to include an R.S.V.P. date at least one week prior to the party date. Include a telephone number or an email address to simplify R.S.V.P. responses. Many of your guests won't R.S.V.P. so always plan for more guests than you have responses.

## **STEP 10 – Gather the Supplies!**

Sit down and make a list of everything you want or need to compliment your theme. A few of these items might include:

**Birthday Cake or Cupcakes** – How many guests will you be entertaining? Your average round birthday cake will feed 10-12 guests. A flat sheet cake will feed approximately one guest for every 2-3 square inches. Cupcakes save the mess and bother of cutting and distributing a larger cake. *Baskin Robbins*, *Carvel* and *Dairy Queen* all offer delicious ice cream cakes that make a delicious alternative. Whatever your choice, order your cake at least two weeks before the event...especially if you want a special size or unique design. If the bakery doesn't deliver, plan ahead to have a family member or friend pick the cake up on party day. You're going to be busy. Be sure the bakery will be open on the day you plan to pick up the cake.

**Room Decorations** – Will you need streamers for the ceiling and doorway? Pick two theme colors and center your decorations on these colors.

**Balloons** – Balloons, either air or helium, are a great addition to any party. Try tying a helium balloon to each chair at the party table or to each party bag. This way, each child knows he or she will have a balloon to carry home after the party. Stick to your main theme colors. This way you won't have children fighting over a specific color...and you, quite naturally only have one in that color. And, be sure and put some balloons on your mailbox so your guests can find your house easily.

When you order helium balloons, plan on having them delivered or pick them up as close to the party time as possible. Helium balloons generally lose their buoyancy within 6-8 hours of being inflated. If your balloon-supplier uses a latex sealant called Hi-Float, the balloons

can stay aloft for up to a week. However, most balloon suppliers have stopped using Hi-Float for liability reasons. People inhale the liquid latex sealant while sucking helium from balloons...a practice that is dangerous in itself.

If you are transporting the helium balloons yourself remember that helium expands in the heat and contracts in the cold. If it's a hot day, remind the supplier to under inflate each balloon by 10% to limit breakage. This will give the helium room to expand without bursting on the way home. Always buy two or three more balloons than you need...just in case one or two escape or break on the way home.

**SAFETY NOTES REGARDING BALLOONS** - For the safety of party guests under the age of three, please avoid balloons or keep them high and out of reach without direct supervision. Choking on a broken balloon is a very real threat. If you must have balloons around the younger guests, try to avoid flesh tone and dark colors like red, pink, dark green, black, brown, and clear. Stick to brighter colors like orange, yellow, bright green and white. Brighter colors will appeal to the younger children and are more readily visible to an EMT's probe should the worst happen.

If you're planning a balloon release, wherein helium balloons are allowed to fly away, check your local laws first. Some areas prohibit balloon releases for environmental or safety reasons. Avoid releasing metallic Mylar balloons or using metallic ribbon or wires on balloons to be released. These balloons and ribbons can conduct electricity if they come into contact with power lines or transformers. Local laws require Mylar balloons to be anchored with appropriate weights at all times. Watch younger children around electrical sources such as lamps, fans and outlets with Mylar balloons and metallic ribbons.

**Table Decorations** – Paper table coverings are a great idea for younger parties. You can either buy a themed package from a party or paper goods store or design your own using rolled butcher's paper. Design your own centerpiece, tableware, napkins, party hats and favors with a construction paper, glue sticks and crayons. Use your imagination. Instead of buying...use things from around the house. Toys, color pages, books and cut-outs make great decorations.

**Nametags** – With today's computer programs, designing party favors and nametags has never been easier. Nametags make it easier for you and your helpers to identify each child by name. It's easier for children and parents who may not know one another to feel more at ease. Try this icebreaker game: Print or mark one of six different colored dots on each nametag...two or three different color dots per tag with each tag being a little different. Put one color on each side of a pair of dice. Throw the dice and announce the two colors showing. The children with the color on the first die must find the children with the colors showing on the second die and hold hands.

**Games** – Internet sites abound featuring fun "everybody wins" party games. Use your favorite search engine, like *www.Google.com* to locate these sites by searching for *Party Games*, *Indoor Games* and *Outdoor Games*. You can also find great books at your local library. Here are some games I played with my kids when I taught school:

## **Rapid-Fire Artist**

Materials: Paper and Pencils

Number of players: Two or more teams with equal numbers

Object of the game: Identify drawing

Each team sends an "artist" to the leader. The leader whispers to the artists an animal or anything else to draw. The artists race back to their groups and begin to draw furiously. As soon as the group recognizes what is being drawn, the members yell it all together. The artist must not give them any tip except by his drawing. He can not say anything to the team or use letters or numbers in the drawing. Each time a new artist must be sent to the leader.

## **Do this and More**

Materials: none

Number of players: Six or more

Object of the game: Copy the actions of other players and add new actions.

One player begins the game by doing something, such as putting the thumbs in the ears and wiggling the fingers. He points to another player who must repeat that action and add one of his own, such as putting his hand under his chin and wiggling his fingers. The next player may add sticking out his tongue. Each successive player must repeat, in order, all of the actions of the other players and add another. No player can be called more than once unless he requests it.

## **Brownie Eating Contest**

Materials: One homemade frosted brownie for each kid, Paper plates

Number of players: Everyone

Object of the game: Eating Brownies

The kids kneel on the floor in a circle, with their hand behind their backs. A paper plate with a brownie is placed on the floor in front of them. On signal, they lean forward and eat the pie as quickly as possible. The first one to finish their brownie and pick the plate up with their teeth is the winner. You can also have a special prize for the kid with the messiest face. Be sure to take pictures!

## **Gather the Candy**

Materials: wrapped small candy such as sour balls, Tootsie Rolls, Jolly Rancher type candies or butterscotch pieces. Toothpicks

Number of players: Everyone

Spread the candy around in a large circle marked out on the floor, or a clean plastic tablecloth. Each player is given two toothpicks and a small paper bag. On signal, the players try to lift, chopstick style, as many pieces of candy into their bag as they can. When all the candy is gathered, the one with the most wins. The kids keep their candy, but the winner receives a small prize.

## **Battle of the Oranges**

Materials: Spoons and oranges

Number of players: Two or more teams with equal numbers

Divide the kids into pairs. They will battle one pair at a time. Each warrior is armed with a tablespoon on which an orange is placed. At the "go" signal, they will try to knock the opponent's orange off the spoon, using only the one hand which holds the spoon and orange. The winner is the one left with their orange on the spoon!

## **Clothes Pins in the Bottle**

Materials: Clothes pins and a jar or a bottle with a large opening

Number of players: Two or more teams with equal numbers.

Place a milk bottle (or other jar with a small opening) on the ground or floor. Let each kid try dropping ten clothespins into the bottle. See who can make the best score. Note: Yes, you can still buy clothespins in the supply section of most grocery stores!

## **Ping Pong Race**

Materials: A ping pong ball for each team and drinking straws for each player.

Number of players: Two or more teams with equal numbers.

Object of the game: To finish first

Each team forms a line. A starting line is made by putting masking tape across the floor and a finish line is made on the other side of the room. Using only the air they can blow out of the straw, players must push the ping pong ball in front of them all the way to the finish line and come back to the starting line. Then the next person has a turn. The first team who has all their players have a turn wins.

## **Musical Balloons**

Materials: Music and balloons for each player

Number of players: Six or more

Object of the game: To be holding a balloon when the music stops

Players must stand in a circle. All participants, except one are given a balloon. As the music starts all the players pass their balloons to the right. When the music stops, the player without a balloon is out. The action is repeated with one less player and one less balloon each time. Play until there is one child remaining. If a balloon pops, then any player without a balloon when the music stops is out.

## **Walk the Plank**



Material: Board or strip of cloth about 6 inches wide.  
Number of players: Three or more  
Object of the game: Successfully walk the plank.

Place a board (or cloth) on the ground. This is the pirates' plank. The children must walk the plank from one end to the other, and back again, with falling into the water. This sounds easy enough, except the water is full of sharks, crocodiles, and piranha. The other children play the part of the hungry creatures in the deep as the victim walks the plank. The sea creatures are line up along the plank about three feet away. They can't touch the plank-walker, but are allowed to make growling and biting noises and gestures to scare him into falling off the plank and into the water.

Hint: To make the game more difficult use a narrower board.

## Ha, Ha

Materials: None  
Number of players: Five or more  
Object of the game: Keep from laughing

Players are seated in a circle. The first player starts by saying, "Ha." The second player says, "Ha, Ha." The third says, "Ha, Ha, Ha." And so it goes around the circle with each player adding another "Ha." In each case the "Ha's" must be pronounced solemnly. The chances are, however, that it will not get around the circle before the entire is responding with gales of laughter. Challenge player to keep the circle going as long as possible with anybody cracking up.

## Tic-Toc Find the Clock

Materials: Kitchen timer.  
Number of players: Three or more.  
Object of the game: Locate the clock.

Have the children leave the playing area. Wind up a kitchen timer and hide it in the game area. If the timer has a loud tic-toc sound, wrap it up in a towel to muffle the sound a bit. Bring the children into the room and have them find the clock. Have them locate the "clock" by the sound of the tic-toc. The children will need to be quiet in order to hear the tic-toc. The first one who finds the timer is the winner. The winner gets to hide the timer for the next round.

**Variation:** For older children use a time with a soft tic-toc or wrap it up with a couple of towels to reduce the noise. To add confusion and make the game harder, you may plant a decoy "clock" that also ticks. This time will be a plain sight and not the hidden clock. It's purpose is to create noise to make it harder to hear the hidden timer.

## Bandit

Materials: none  
Number of players: Six or more  
Object of the game: To be the last one remaining in the game.

The players sit in a circle. When the leader points to a player in a circle and calls out "Bandit!" that player must place his hands over his ears immediately. At the same time, each of his two neighbors must place the hand nearest the bandit over his own ear on that side. The last of the three to cover his ears is out of the game. The bandit then calls the next bandit and the game goes on.

## **Chase the Animal**

Materials: Three beanbags

Number of players: To pass the beanbags around a circle.

The players form a circle. One of the beanbags is given the name of an animal and started around the circle. After the beanbag goes around once, the leader starts another animal. The animal tries to catch up with the first one. After another time around a third animal is started on it's way. There is no winner or loser in this game.

## **Cartoon Twenty Questions**

Materials: none

Number of players: Four or more

A player writes the name of a cartoon character on a piece of paper. The players can ask only yes or no questions to find out who the cartoon character is. The first person to guess the cartoon character gets to be the next leader.

## **Prizes**

Finding wonderful prizes is easy! All kids love bean bag animals (even if they aren't the collectible ones), which can be found everywhere. Bags of plastic bugs and animals are a good choice, as well as inexpensive story books. Bandannas are a fun choice too. Red ones for boys so they can pretend to be cowboys or pirates. Pastel ones are great for girls because they become a fashion accessory. In the house wares department you will find many fun smaller boxes and containers that could be used as treasure boxes for nature finds or other collectibles. Visiting an educational or nature store will give you even more ideas, such as a bag of gemstones. They are beautiful and boys or girls would love them!

**Candles & Lighter** - Believe it or not, this is the most overlooked item on the list. Candles and a lighter are such a no-brainer that people put them off to last...and forget them. Consider using a single number candle rather than multiple candles on your cake. This makes lighting easier and the birthday wish a breeze. Also, try using one of the long-nose butane wand lighters to ignite the candles. It makes lighting easier and avoids scorched mommy fingers.

One other small tip. In this day of ultra health-conscious parents, I've heard repeated concerns over the spray from the birthday wish blow. Try laying a single layer of kitchen cellophane wrap loosely over the top of your cake. Leave a small hole for the candle(s). Your cake is still visible and all of the mothers will applaud your creativity in showing concern for their child.

**Film, Camera & Batteries** – Be sure to have plenty of film, video tapes, memory sticks or whatever your camera uses. Keep extra batteries on hand, just in case. Recharge your video batteries the day before the party. Keep a copy of the birthday guest list with first and last names to make it easier to label each photo for your child's keepsake scrapbook...and to remember who was who when you and your grandchild browse the scrapbook years from now. If you expect to be kept busy hosting, assign the duty of "Official Photographer" to a willing adult or older sibling.

You might want to create a simple comedy pose board in your party theme. Use a stiff piece of cardboard and cut a hole large enough for a child's head to poke through. Below the head, draw and paint a picture of a birthday clown, cowboy, spaceman or ballerina...whatever compliments your theme. Paint "Billy's 8<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party" on the front of the board...personalized to your child, of course. Take a photo of each child posing with the board. Send the developed photo along with your thank you notes as a nice keepsake. Remember to keep a copy of each photo for your party scrapbook.

**Piñatas** – Piñatas are fun for any party! But, traditional piñatas are the second most common cause of injuries at birthday parties. You should plan on providing close parental supervision all through the excitement. Many a Dad has met a disastrous fate holding the piñata at arm's length on a rod or broomstick. Hang the piñata from a stable tree limb, swing set frame or similar sturdy support. Use a good strong twine or rope to secure the piñata. Poke a couple of holes through the side of the piñata and run the cord through for extra strength...the greatest weakness of many piñatas is the hook attached to the rope. Draw a "Safety Line" at least three times the length of the piñata bat behind the piñata and assign an adult or older sibling to insure that all of the children remain behind this line while a child is swinging. Be ready to step in and safely grab the bat the instant the piñata breaks to avoid hitting children rushing to grab the spilled candy.

Most piñatas are designed to withstand the swings of teens and adults. To make the piñata easier for younger children to break, run a web of light scores with a single-edged razor blade or Exacto knife from the top of the piñata to the base. Slightly score the surface of the piñata without cutting all the way through. This makes the piñata more vulnerable to a younger child's light swing without ruining the fun.

For those parents looking for a less violent piñata, some innovative chap has invented one with a number of ribbons strung along the bottom. One ribbon pulls open a trap door releasing the inner treasure. The other ribbons are all dummies that simply come off in the child's hand. The children take turns choosing a ribbon and pulling. This new piñata is much safer and just as much fun as the breakaway units. If you want to delay the opening as long as possible...locate the trigger ribbon by looking for a ribbon tied directly to the bottom flap. Roll it up and tuck it just inside the flap. The children can pull freely until you're ready to let the birthday child have the honor of "busting the piñata. Casually pull the trigger ribbon down while "adjusting the piñata" and let the birthday child have a pull. Another option is to give every child a couple of ribbons...including the trigger ribbon... and everyone pulls at once!

For a change, try a traditional Korean piñata. Buy a large, stiff plastic beach-size ball that will hold its shape when deflated. Cut the ball in half. Fill the ball with candy & treats and tape it back together. Decorate the ball with strips of colored paper and ribbons and hang it from a tree branch or swing set with a sturdy cord tied through two holes in the top. Give the children semi-soft balls such as dodge balls or tennis balls to throw at the piñata at

will...preferably from the same safe direction towards a open field or a blank wall or fence. Keep throwing the balls at the piñata ball until it splits open and spills the delights inside!

Concerned about putting candy in a piñata? Load it with little balloons, tattoos, penny toys and sugar-free delights. One innovative mother loaded the piñata with treasure maps loaded in pink and blue plastic eggs with each child's name written on the outside. Each map led the children on a personal treasure hunt to their personal party bag...located around the front of the house. This avoids the common "He got more candy than I did!" complaint and what a great way to end a party!

**Party Bags** - Party bags are a great way of thanking your guests for coming to the party. Don't go overboard...it really is the thought that counts here. Consider the age of your guests and purchase appropriate puzzles, finger toys, booklets or similar little items to place into small colorful bags. Try to avoid choking hazard toys, Your guests may be over the choking danger age, but they may have younger siblings at home.

*Party City* and popular *Dollar* stores carry a great variety of inexpensive party favors. You can also order themed favors from [www.birthdayexpress.com](http://www.birthdayexpress.com) or [www.smalltoys.com](http://www.smalltoys.com). I recommend that the hosting parent and the birthday child stand at the door and hand a party bag to each guest as they leave. The parent thanks the adult and the birthday child thanks the younger guest. This example teaches each child a valuable lesson in social etiquette.

## **STEP 11 – Plan the Day!**

This is where you envision the way you want your party to progress...and plan for the worst case scenarios...just in case. Most parties occur in five stages: Early Arrival, High Energy, Calming Period, Departure and Closure.

**Stage 1 – Activity Time** – You will usually have one or two children who will arrive ahead of schedule. Have a craft table set up so they can color a party page, design their own party hat, decorate their nametag, make *Play Dough* characters as centerpieces, sign and decorate a birthday banner, or design individual cards for the birthday child. Create a homemade guest book from construction paper, cloth-covered cardboard and yarn...then have each guest sign and decorate their own keepsake page for the book. These books will become a great source of memories in years to come. *Family Fun Magazine* is always full of great party and craft ideas. You can find them at [www.familyfun.com](http://www.familyfun.com). Consider setting a video camera on a secure tripod and allow each child to leave a short video message for the birthday child. If you are renting a bounce house, this is the time for that.

**Stage 2 – High Energy Entertainment** – You should plan on starting the entertainment and activities around 15-30 minutes after the scheduled arrival time. This gives any late arrivals a chance to join the party without missing the fun. This should be a high energy, fun period. It's the perfect spot for a spirited entertainer who gets the children involved in acting out and cheering.

**Stage 3 – Calming Period** – Eventually, you'll reach a point (generally the last 30 minutes of the party) where you'll want the children to start calming. After all...we all want the children to enjoy their cake and ice cream...not wear it home. Create a transition between the high energy and the calming periods with a birthday parade. Line the children up behind the birthday child and let them choose imaginary band instruments...don't forget the

piano and the kazoo! Let the children use that final burst of energy as they follow the birthday child in a twisting parade around the yard or through the house playing a lively "Happy Birthday" on their instruments! After a few minutes, lead the parade to the birthday table for cake and ice cream.

Some parents choose to open gifts at the party...others choose to wait until after everyone is gone. Either is correct and subject only to your time and party goals. If you choose to open the gifts during the party, have each child collect the gift they brought and hold it. One by one, have each child present their gift to the birthday child and stand by for the ooh's and aah's to follow. This involves each child in the giving spirit and keeps control. Assign another adult or older sibling to keep an accurate list of which child gave which gift for later "Thank You" cards.

**Stage 4 – Departure** – No one wants a fun party to end. A piñata treasure hunt is a great way to signal the close of your party. When the piñata breaks, each child finds a plastic egg with their name on it. Inside each egg is a custom treasure clue sending the children in search of new clues scattered throughout the yard or (shudder) house. For children who can't yet read, clues can be made up of pictures cut from magazines showing various objects around the yard or house. Each location yields a new clue or picture. Eventually, all clues point to the front door where the birthday child waits to thank each guest and personally hand them a party bag and balloon. When the guests are gone, the birthday child should personally thank and hand a small token gift to each family member and special guest (remember the sibling's helper guests?) who helped make this day so special.

**Stage 5 - Follow-Up** – As soon as possible after the party, encourage your child to write personal thank you notes to each party guest for the gifts received. If the child cannot write, encourage him or her to help you decorate and mail personal thank you notes. Good manners are taught at home. Sit down with the family immediately and discuss things that went wrong and ways to make the next party even better. Make notes and store them away in the back of the party keepsake book for the next family celebration.

**The Unexpected Stage – Stuff Happens** – Have towels, mop or cleaning supplies handy for spills. Keep a couple of spare items of clothing handy for the birthday boy or girl...for those last minute changes. Be sure to clear the party area of sharp, rusted, fragile or hazardous objects...inquisitive hands wander into the oddest places. Secure the gates to swimming pools so that little feet can't wander in. Stock a supply of brightly colored *Band-Aids* for those little scrapes, bruises and imaginary hurts. Keep even the gentlest pets away from the party. Large crowds and probing fingers can spook even the friendliest pet into reacting tragically. Try to recruit enough adults to provide sufficient adult supervision.

## **STEP 12 – Put It All Together!**

The day has arrived! The dog just chased the cat down the hall, tipping over the goldfish bowl spilling water into your grandmother's piano. The birthday girl just came in from the backyard with the cutest little drippy mud pies, a big smile on her face and a huge muddy smear down the front of her pink party dress. And then...the doorbell!

**Take a moment to remember Step #1.** Take a deep breath...smile back at the party girl...and make this day a special one. After all, you planned ahead for this...didn't you? Think of it as a great story to share at the next church social or family reunion!

Before you know it, you'll be making college or wedding plans for your little ones. Memories are too priceless to allow a mud pie or a water-logged piano to dampen them. So, move forward and create a birthday that you and your child will laugh over and treasure forever!

## **Birthday to Do List**

Personally, I hate to forget things, so I'm always sure to write everything down. This Birthday to Do List isn't meant to make you worry about all the things you'll need to keep up with. It's just here to make sure you don't forget anything.

### **4 to 6 Weeks Before**

- Book entertainment
- Reserve Party Location (If it's not at your home)
- Order rental equipment

### **3 to 4 Weeks Before**

- Create a guest list
- Create a party budget
- Pick theme or decor
- Order party supplies
- Decide menu & drinks
- Create menu & grocery list
- Create party supply shopping list
- Decide activities & games
- Send party invitations

### **2 to 3 Weeks before**

- Order party favors
- Buy birthday games & game items
- Order Balloons
- Enlist party helpers
- Gather owned party supplies (banners, utensils, platters)
- List other supplies needed
- Buy piñata, candy & fillers
- Place RSVP guest list & pen by the phone

### **1 Week Before**

- Do any heavy cleaning
- Order cake
- Order Flowers
- Buy non-perishable food & beverages
- Buy candles
- Procure matches
- Bake & freeze unfrosted cake if making your own
- Buy freezable foods
- Schedule activities
- Call non RSVP guests

### **Two Days Before**

- Check camera batteries
- Buy extra batteries
- Clean party area
- Make necessary space in the refrigerator

Buy extra garbage bags, foil & plastic wrap  
Arrange party favors  
Confirm entertainment  
Select music  
Fill piñata

### **Day Before**

Clean bathrooms  
Wash outdoor surfaces  
Charge video recorder  
Decorate party room  
Childproof party area  
Gather games or activities  
Set out party favors  
Buy undelivered floral arrangements  
Prepare food that refrigerates well overnight  
Arrange food delivery  
Eat out or order in

### **Party Day**

Pick up ordered cake, ice, balloons  
Frost & decorate homemade cake  
Decorate indoor and outdoor party areas  
Set up party games  
Gather serving pieces  
Have camera ready  
Prepare perishable food  
Check bathroom for needed supplies (toilet paper, hand towels, soap)  
Secure pets as needed

## **Are Birthdays important?**

I certainly believe they are! The Birthday Party celebrates a person's presence among us and establishes the child's great value within the family. It's a time to remember the joy we felt as we welcomed this new, little life into our own. To deny the importance of this annual celebration is a blow that can seriously harm a child's self esteem and sense of family. That said...does it have to be an elaborate and expensive affair? Heck no! Any event that places a child (or parent) in the center of the familial universe for even a day helps to build a solid sense of self worth. Supporting this day for other members of the family builds the child's sense of family. It can be something as simple as a family meal where the birthday member chooses the entire menu and sits at the "*position of honor*" at the head of the table...a reminder that they, too, will one day lead a family. Remember to include yourselves, the parents, in these celebrations. There are few greater honors or stronger bonds for a child than planning and hosting a birthday celebration for a cherished parent.