7 STEPS to a GREAT BIRTHDAY PARTY

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Step 1 – Choose a Theme

Coming up with a Good Theme

The best birthday parties always have a good theme! I've performed for a lot of birthday celebrations and believe me, the best gatherings have a theme. Themed parties are fun, unique, can be educational, interactive and even flexible/adaptable to small and/or large groups of children. A theme will help make your event that much better and more memorable.

Start Early

Do you want to relieve a lot of stress? Start planning early! If possible, get the ball rolling at least three months prior to the party. Make it fun. Brainstorm ideas with your child and come up with something everyone will enjoy. You can go with a commercial theme or a non-commercial theme.

Most of my shows book 3-4 months in advance

Commercial vs. Non-Commercial Themes

A big plus of a commercial theme is that you can take advantage of an established kid's favorite character and it's easy to find accessories, but it can get costly. The non-commercial requires a little more creativity, but it will help if you are on a tight budget.

Themes on a Budget

Here are some great non-commercial themes that cost very little to put together and will hopefully get your creative side in gear:

Welcome to Treasure Island!

ARRR! Pirate themed parties are always a big hit. There are so many possibilities with this theme and it's very easy to find supplies. Make fun message in a bottle invitations by saving plastic bottles and inserting a treasure map invitation inside with directions to your house and a big "X" marking the spot of the party. On the day of the party put a sign out front that says "Welcome to Treasure Island" and a big "X" on your front door letting visitors know that they have found the secret spot.

Activities can include a treasure hunt with loot bags, parrot piñata, eye patches, temporary tattoos, gold coin & ring around the sword tosses. And if you want to really go all out, have cannonball wars using black water balloons (just let parents know before the party).

For snacks, serve "Fish & Chips" (goldfish & potato chips mixed together) in giant seashells and/or pirate hats, pizzas can be decorated with sliced green peppers placed in the form of an "X." Turn hot dogs in buns into pirate ships by inserting wooden skewers into them with square pieces of paper attached to look like sails. Olives can be named "Cannon Balls." Wraps can be called "Sea Weed Wraps." Fruit bowls can be named "Pirate Jewels." For drinks serve root beer and bottled water in a big tub of ice calling them "Pirate Beer & Sea Water." As you can see, there are unlimited possibilities with a Pirate Theme. YO HO! LET'S GO!

Jungle Party

Have a wildly good time by gathering all of the lions, tigers, and bears in the vicinity to throw your child a grrrrr-eat birthday party! For invitations, attach a card to a box of animal crackers and hand deliver to your guests. Or, you can create one that looks like a passport with "Africa" stamped inside the cover. For more themed settings you can use plastic safari hats, plastic binoculars, magnifying glasses and butterfly nets. Famished explorers can enjoy trail mix, gummy worms and bug juice. You can make cupcakes that resemble tigers my using orange mix with black swirls. Once again, the possibilities are limitless. WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE!

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Below is a list of possible themes for your child:

Toddlers

Lady Bug Party	Rainbow Party	Zoo Animal Party
Candy Theme Party	Farm Animal Party	Fairy Party

Preschoolers

Dinosaur Party	**Magic Party**	Bubble Party
Under the Sea Party	Monster Party	Carnival Party
Train Party	Candy Themed Party	Dance Party
Firefighter Party	Bubble Party	Pirate Party

School-Aged

Construction Party	Sleepover Party	Splash Party
Sports Party	**Magic Party**	Music Themed Party
Tie-Dyed Party	Cheerleading Party	Dance Party
Kid's Cooking Party	Scrap Booking Party	Glow Party
Fairy Tale Party	Space Party	Bowling Party
Craft Party	Backyard Campout	Superhero Party

Step 2 - Choose a Date & Place

The sooner you start, the better for selecting when and where to have the party. If you wait too long you could find yourself competing with other birthday parties and if you want to have the event at an outside source, you might not be able to secure the location.

Home vs. Outside Venue

If you're on a tight budget then the home is the best place to have the party. Below are some advantages and disadvantages for having an in-home party.

Advantages
Saves Money
Convenient
Can Set Up Early
Most Needed Items in Home
Always Available

Disadvantages
Space Limitation for Smaller Homes
More Cleaning on the Front End
More Cleaning After the Party

The best parties I've performed at have always been in a home!

Using an Outside Venue has Advantages and Disadvantages as well.

Advantages
No Cleaning Before the Party
Clean Up After the Party is a Snap
Fun Atmosphere
Work with Professionals
Simple

Disadvantages
Can be Expensive
Inconvenient (if you forget something)
Large Crowds Possible
Parking Can Be Hard to Find
Often Difficult to Secure Date & Time

Time is Important

It's best to start your party on the quarter hour (See Bonus #1 - How to Get Your Guest to Arrive on Time). If you're planning to feed everyone then have it around lunch or dinner time. If you don't want to feed the attendees a main course, then have the party mid-morning or mid-afternoon.

Serving food becomes an activity & takes away the time that you would have to spend entertaining guests!

How Long Should the Party Be?

I recommend a shorter party for younger guests & a bit longer party for the older guests. I**f you plan a longer party, you will make it more difficult on yourself.** Leave the guests wanting more!

Toddlers	1 – 1.5 hours
Preschoolers	2 – 2.5 hours
School Aged	2 – 3 hours

Step 3 - Plan the Party

Decorations

Here are some ideas on ways you can add a festive atmosphere to your party:

- **Streamers** – This is one of the least expensive ways to decorate.
- **Balloons** – These can be attached to a mailbox or a sign outside to let guests know where to find the party. They make great decorations and kids love to take them home. And while we are on the subject…

KEEP READING…

Important Balloon Handling Tips

Here are some things to consider when you are shopping for balloons:

- For best results always have a professional inflate the balloons with helium. It's best to have a retail or party store handle it.
- Always pick up your balloons the day of the party! The fresher they are the better. DON'T PICK THEM UP THE DAY BEFORE OR THEY WILL DEFLATE!
- Some stores offer treated balloons that will hold the helium longer.
- Keep your balloons indoors until it's time to decorate. Balloons can lose their shine or even pop if they're put outside too soon.
- Ask the store to use a separate string to tie off the strings holding the balloons as close to the balloons as possible. This will save you from having to untangle them. This simple request can save you lots of time and aggravation. Which is the last thing you need on the day of the party!

Food Tips

- Serve cupcakes if you want to save yourself the hassle of sloppy cake cutting and a messy cleanup. They are easy to make and are instantly ready to serve and eat. They can even be affordably purchased from your local grocery store saving you time.
- To simplify things, it's best to have bottled water or juice boxes in a cooler. If you want to make clean up a snap, use paper plates, napkins, plastic cups & utensils.
- Finger foods like pizzas, carrots, grapes and healthy chips are perfect for children. They are easy to serve, eat and are easily disposed. Hot dogs can be fun as well. Just cut the wieners along the sides and shape them into a person and boil it. The dog will grow arms and legs! Decorate with mustard or ketchup for eyes and mouth.
- Tacos in a bag are so much fun! Purchase individual small bags of your favourite taco chips. Cook hamburger or turkey meat & add taco seasoning. Put out all of the fixings like lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, salsa & sour cream. Let the kids mix everything in their taco chip bags & eat with a plastic fork. They're fun to munch on & require no plates!

Games/Activities

Here are some ideas to get your creative mind going:

Water Balloon Toss – Make sure parents know that their kids will be getting wet.

Balloon Relay Race - Before the party, inflate about three balloons per child. Divide the guests into two teams. Each child runs to a pre-determined point, sits on their balloon, pops it and runs back to tag the next runner. The first team to pop one balloon per child wins the race. Be sure to have prizes for both the winners and the second place team. Do a re-run if the kids really enjoy it!

Pin the Tail to the Dinosaur - Why not update classic game, and pin a tail on a dinosaur. Just draw the parts yourself. How about Pin the Hat on the Magician?

Pillow Art - Have your guests decorate white pillow cases with color markers and sponge stamps. Everyone can draw on each other's case like signing a yearbook. You can make just about any shape by cutting out sponges. Dollar stores are a great place to purchase sponges.

Don't forget about the classics - **Duck Duck Goose, Musical Chairs, Limbo, Simon Says, Hot Potato Pass, Hide & Seek and Freeze Dance.**

One of the biggest mistakes made by parents is over planning activities. Too many games and a stringent schedule can stifle children and prevent them from using their own creativity to have fun. Kids will always find a way to entertain themselves…so don't over plan!

Rule of Thumb - If the kids are having fun, stick with that activity. When they seem to get bored, change it up!

KEEP READING…

Step 4 - Decide Who's Coming

How Many to Invite

On average, birthday parties range anywhere from **10 to 20 kids**. You want to have a good turnout for your child's party, but you probably don't want a huge number of rambunctious kids tearing up your home or rented facility either.

A good gauge is to expect 65-75% of the kids invited to attend the party. In other words, if you invite 20 children, on average, around 15 will show up. Make sure everyone RSVP's. The sooner you get the invitations out the more likely you are to have a good showing (See my Birthday Party Checklist). Be prepared that everyone may show up as well.

Invitations

You can purchase all sorts of invitations locally, online or you can make your own customized invitations.

Evite.com is a great online service that will allow you to design your own invitations. It's quick, easy and very efficient.

To encourage promptness use the suggestions in the guide "How to Get Your Guests to Arrive on Time!" found at the end of this e-book.

Step 5 - Justin Alan's Birthday Party Checklist

The best way to climb a mountain is one step at a time. This is true with any large task that you take on…and planning a birthday party is no exception. Try to start planning at least three months before. It's no big deal if you have less time, just step up your game a bit. Take care of the major things early like choosing a location, planning entertainment, choosing a theme, etc. to avoid any last minute disappointments. Remember, your child only turns their particular age once. Proper planning will eliminate stress and allow you to enjoy the party.

(The checklist can be found at the end of this e-book)

Step 6 - Party Setup

If you followed the Birthday Party Checklist then setup should be a whiz! Charge all video and digital cameras the night before. In addition, make sure all memory cards have ample storage space. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have an extra memory card available as well. Ask friends to bring their cameras to the party. You don't want to miss any picture perfect moments.

Setup as much as possible the night before. This is a lot easier if you're having the party at your home. If you have decided to use an outside venue then you will need to check with the establishment to see how early you can arrive. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time!

Step 7- Party Time!

This is when all of your hard work pays off. If you've followed the checklist then all you have to do is tie up some loose ends and have a ball! Put any signs and/or balloons in the yard to let attendees know the location of the party. Make it stand out!

Get the drinks ready first. Remember to put them in a cooler before filling it with ice. It takes about thirty minutes for them to cool if they're packed properly. Any food you're going to serve can be set out fifteen minutes before the fun begins. Make sure you can locate the lighter.

In regards to clean up… GET HELP! Who better to ask then the kids at the party? Make a game out of it. Give prizes for the child who picks up the most trash. Be sure to have plenty of 30 gallon yard garbage bags available.

On last bit of advice, make sure to return anything rented or borrowed and get out thank you cards within 24 hours. Get this stuff out of the way ASAP so you can move on with your busy life and enjoy the wonderful memories you've created!

7 Steps to a Great Birthday Party - Party Planning Guide

How to Get Your Guests to Arrive on Time!

Follow these simple steps to encourage guests to be prompt so everyone can enjoy the party!

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1. **Start on the quarter hour.** For example, begin at 2:15 or 2:45 p.m. I learned this technique from a professional meeting planner years ago… It works!

2. **Add the word(s) "Sharp or On the Dot" after the start time.** This will help plant the time in your guest minds. Example- 2:15 p.m. On the Dot.

3. **Request that your guests be on time.** This should go without saying, but you need to say it. Use the words, "Please be on time" in your invitation. Most people will respond when asked.

4. **Reminders should go out one week before the party.** You can mail a postcard or you can send out an email. Evite.com is great online source for managing invitations. Just state something like, "Don't forget, Billy's birthday party is Saturday at 2:15 p.m. Sharp. We look forward to seeing you there!"

5. **Add a "Fudge Factor"**. Unfortunately, no matter what you do, chances are there will be some stragglers. As a parent, you understand that things happen! Therefore, **it's best to begin any activities or entertainment 30 minutes after your start time.** Plus, it gives kids a chance to let off some steam.

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7 Steps to a Great Birthday Party - Party Planning Guide

Justin Alan's Birthday Party Checklist

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3 Months Before The Party

	Pick Theme
	Choose Date
	Book Entertainment (if needed)
	Book Facility (if needed)

6 Weeks Before The Party

	Make Invitation List
	Create Invitations
	Plan Activities & Food

2-3 Weeks Before The Party

	Send Invitations
	Order Cake/Food
	Make Supply List

1 Week Before The Party

	Send Reminders
	Ask Friends to Help
	Buy Everything on Supply List
	Assemble Goodie Bags

3 Days Before The Party

	Order Balloons
	Prepare Games
	Buy Drinks/Water
	Grab Lawn Size Garbage Bags

1 Day Before The Party

	Pick up Cake/Candles
	Buy Ice
	Decorate (if in your home)
	Charge camera/phone
	Clear memory/storage

Day of The Party

	Pick up Balloons
	Fill Cooler
	Decorate (if at a facility)
	Prepare Table for Gifts
	Put Out Food
	Put Balloons Outside

24 Hours After the Party

	Send Thank You Notes
	Return Anything Borrowed/Rented

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