



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.

Write something like, "Please let us know whether or not you can come."
"Tracy (the birthday child) really hopes you can!"

Ask for information

You also need to be sure that you get all the important information from them about the child and confirmation that they understand the arrangements.

Ask the parents to be sure to contact you whether or not they are coming. This makes it easier for your preparations and also saves your child from disappointment if someone they are expecting doesn't show.

You can expect that some parents will arrive with extra siblings of the child you invited (see below). Try to keep this to a minimum by contacting the parents either face to face or by phone to confirm their child's attendance and make the point that the numbers or space is limited.

You need to know in advance about any special diet requirements; food allergies are common and many can have serious consequences or health issues. Some children may need special assistance.

Uninvited Guests

You should prepare extra take home bags and allow for extra food just in case, because it's almost inevitable that you will get one or more extra guests to your child's party.

Whatever the reason for the other parent's breach of good manners, you can't turn away the child. If the party is at an outside venue, you should ask them for the extra fee but don't be surprised if they "don't have it with them".

Party Proof Your Home

When your home is the venue, you need to allow time to prepare for the "invasion".

You need to protect your property and also to make sure that there is little chance that any of the children or supporting adults might be injured while they are there.

Pets: Even if your pets are used to attention from children and dependable around them, it's always safer for all concerned to put them in the care of an adult and away from the excitement of the actual party.

You have too much to do to be able to ensure that the children and pets don't cause each other any problems.

Some of the children may simply be afraid of your pets or too attentive and unintentionally cause them distress or even injury.

And, of course, the animals may have some fears about some of the children too.

There is always the possibility that the animals may hurt a child or damage their special party clothes. Whether it is the fault of the animal or the child, it's a problem which can and should be avoided.

Valuables: Pack away your valuable but breakable items rather than just trying to put them out of reach. Children can and will climb to reach something which attracts them and that can result in damage to the item or the child.

Danger: If there are very young children visiting, get some plugs to block electric outlets. That is cheap insurance.

Store out of sight any aerosols or other items containing hazardous substances.

Getting the Party Started

Make time to have a talk with the birthday child and your other children a day or two before the party.

Make it clear how you expect them to behave with the other children and when opening presents or during games.

You won't have any time to spare on the actual day of the party, so use check lists to help avoid leaving any important tasks undone.

Write up a schedule for the different parts of the party.

Check with the entertainer and the outside venue the day before the party, not on the day of the event.

That will keep your phones available on the day for incoming calls.

If you are holding the party at your home, set up a table for the presents separate from the table where the children will be eating or playing.

Keep the cake out of sight and protected from possible accidental damage until the games or entertainment are finished and everybody is ready to start eating.

On the day of the event, you can expect that some children will be late, so you will have to decide how long to wait for them before starting to entertain the other children.

I would not delay the start more than, say, ten minutes because it is not fair to the other children and it can cause problems if any of the activities run over time. You don't want to have parents arriving to pick up their children while you have not started to serve the food!

You need to be ready to introduce the entertainer at the agreed time. They often have booked other parties on the same day and need to keep to a schedule too.

Have some puzzles, a video or joke books available for the children who are waiting for the others to arrive.

When you have your guests together, give them a quick tour of your home, pointing out the toilets and any areas which you don't want them to go into. Make sure that you introduce all other family members, even if they won't be involved in the party.

Give the children some time between games to discuss the previous activity and catch their breath. That creates natural toilet breaks which reduce the chance that children will put off going to the toilet for fear of missing out on something.

Watch for any signs of discomfort or disagreement.

Deal with disruptive behavior immediately but keep it low key.

If one child seems particularly disruptive, try to redirect their energy and attention in a positive direction by asking them to help set up the next activity.

Don't do this in a way which can be seen as rewarding bad behavior.

Make sure that the birthday child thanks every child or family group when they are leaving.

Games

Games for your child's party can be a highlight but there are some important points to remember.



Try to ensure that all the children are involved as much as possible in all the games. Quiet children tend to be overlooked and become isolated. That stops them enjoying the party and their unhappiness may affect the atmosphere of the whole event.

If you have a few team games, mix up the children for each team for the different games so that everybody gets an opportunity to be on a team with as many of the other children as possible.

You need to have some quiet games and activities to let the children cool down. These are also good to have on hand for children when they are waiting to be picked up after the party has finished.

Many of the traditional games are still very popular.

You can always put a twist into them by adding something new or changing some of the details or by adapting them to the theme of the party.

Pin the Tail on the Donkey

The details of this game are easily changed to fit with almost any theme or character.

Pin the tail on the Bunny

Put the beak on the Penguin

Put the nose on the Clown

Put the Cap on the Wizard

.... and many others.

The characters in the examples I listed would all be easy for anyone to draw on a large sheet of light board. Or, you could use butcher paper.

Instead of using pins, put a spot of BluTack adhesive or double-sided tape on the back of the tails so there is less chance of damage to the wall or the child if a tail is placed in the wrong area or with unexpected force.

Musical Chairs

For this game, you need one less chair than the number of children taking part. You arrange the chairs in a single row with every second chair pointing to the opposite wall to the odd numbered chairs.

An adult starts the music from a recording and the children begin to walk in a circle around the row of chairs.

When the music fades, the children all have to sit on a chair. The child that cannot get an empty chair stands aside and the adult raises the volume of the music again for a few seconds.

This sequence continues until all but one child is out.

It's better to quickly lower the volume each time instead of switching the player on and off. Which can cause more wear on the machine.

Karaoke

This is not a game, it's an experience! You can get karaoke machines and CDs in any mall, but they also are usually easy to find in garage sales and on eBay. Some people get tired of the karaoke discs which they have or want to upgrade their equipment.

You might also put "Karaoke computer programs" or something similar into your favorite internet search engine. Be careful to only deal with reputable web sites.

How to Play: Each child gets a turn to mime their favorite song (from those you have available in Karaoke form) to the screams (of laughter) and applause of the other children.

Mind the Message

This game starts with all the children lining up across the room.

You give one child a short message which they whisper to the next child. Each child listens carefully and then whispers the message to the next child in the line.

When the last child hears the message, they walk to the other end of the line and say the message they were given out loud to the child who started the sequence.

That child then reads the message which you gave to them.

There will often be some funny changes to the message during its journey along the line.

If the children want to do it with a different message, you give this one to the person who brought the garbled message back to the original sender.

It's important to keep the message moving along the line from child to child fairly briskly.

Although you might use any messages which suit the age group and the theme, I suggest that you use fairly simple ones. The children will do the rest.

Egg and Spoon Race

This game can be just as much fun and a lot less messy by substituting a table tennis ball or even a plastic egg for the real egg that is traditionally used. Divide the children into teams.

Each child starts with the egg and spoon held in front of them as they walk to a marked point several feet away and back.

Then, they tip the egg or ball into the spoon of the next member of their team.

Emperor Penguin Shuffle

Penguins are probably among most children's favorite creatures. Most will know that the male Emperor penguin protects the egg after the female lays it by carrying it between its feet.

Divide the children into teams.

Children can't safely hold an egg or a ball between their ankles while they move around, so the children will hold a ball between their knees and walk, shuffle or waddle to a point about six to ten feet away, depending on the age of the children at your party.

Then, they turn around and shuffle back to the rest of their team. They can pick up the ball and hand it to the next child who does their own shuffle out and back. This looks very funny and everyone gets a turn.

Breaking Your Piñata

This game has achieved international popularity. It is full of action, noise and everyone gets something nice when the Piñata is broken!

The only significant expense is the cost of the sweets and treats which you put in it. But, that is entirely in your control and is, usually, an extra cost even with many of the most expensive of the commercial piñatas.

You need:

Piñata: You can buy a great variety of Piñatas, but I include simple details in the games chapter about how you and your child can make your own at home for very low cost.

Somewhere to hang it from: You might attach it to a rope that is tied to the branch of a tree or some sturdy and stable gym equipment. The main thing is that it won't hit the children or adults when someone swings a stick at it.

Blindfold: This can be a simple scarf and there's no need to make it completely light proof. This is a game, not a contest and every child really does win a prize, or even more than one!

Sticks: To pound the piñata with. These are usually decorated and should be small enough that they are not likely to hurt any of the participants if someone let go of it when they swing at the piñata.

You need a couple of extra adults to keep everyone clear of the child who is swinging the stick and the spinning piñata.

You should try to shepherd the blindfolded child so they don't do any damage to themselves or anyone else.

Each child has a turn to be blindfolded, and then pointed in the general direction of the suspended piñata. They can be guided closer to it by calls from the other children.

After a couple of swings, whether or not they connect, the child takes off the blindfold.

The stick and the blindfold are passed to the next child.

When the piñata breaks open, everyone can gather some of the treasures which cascade down. The blindfolded child is probably at a slight disadvantage at this point, but they never seem to take very long to get the blindfold off and start to gather their share of the booty!

Prizes

The Piñata delivers prizes to everyone but it's important to have some mementos for each child who takes part in the competitive games.

Children love to win something, it doesn't have to be an expensive trophy either.

Don't just focus on the winners in the games. Present something, however small, to as many of the children as possible.

Stickers are always popular with children. You can buy a wide variety of them in quantity from your local dollar store. Be aware that some stickers have adhesive which can damage some types of clothing and other surfaces when they are removed.

Children also like certificates which are cheap to produce on your computer. I've put some information about free programs which can help you produce certificates and other useful items in the resources chapter.

Crafty Ideas for Your Party

Mask Making

This can be done with almost any group of children, using materials which are appropriate for that particular group.

You can provide designs on the sheets of card which will be made into the masks or let the children draw their own.

The designs need to fit the proportions of the children's faces, so that they can see through the eye holes and poke their tongues through the mouths.

The masks can be drawn, painted, or made from pieces of colored tape or paper.

You might use lengths of hat elastic held at each end with staples to hold the mask to the child's head. Always reinforce the staple by covering with a piece of strong adhesive tape on both the inside and outside of the mask.

This will also help to prevent any chance of the staple scratching the child's head or tangling in their hair.

The type of character which children of different age groups might want to make include animals; real and imaginary or based on characters from books, movies, and Super Heroes from legend and the media.

You will find that most characters can be represented with combinations of simple shapes. But, you will also find beginner books on how to draw the more popular characters in your library or bookstore.

T-Shirt Design

T-shirts are very popular with children and adults.

If you provide some liquid embroidery pens, stencils and blank card, then ask each guest to bring their own plain T-shirt (so you don't have the bother and the expense of getting T-shirts to fit each of them), you can set up a T-shirt painting party.

You will need a few other accessories, including:

Marking pens for drawing the designs the children want on the blank card.

A box knife to cut out the separate parts of each design.

Plenty of bench space for them to use while creating their masterpieces.

Cheap smocks or coveralls so their clothes don't get spattered with paint.

Designs are almost unlimited. You can get a wide variety from the clip-art books at <http://www.doverpublishing.com/>. They provide sample pages to subscribers of their email newsletter.

You, or another responsible adult, should do all the cutting.

This theme provides each guest with a unique and personal gift and possibly helps to improve their self confidence too.

Making a Piñata

This is another craft, but it can't be done at the party because the body of the piñata can take two days to dry before it can be decorated and then demolished.

Breaking a Piñata has become a widely popular game at children's parties around the world.

You can buy piñatas in all sorts of shapes, from fish and donkeys to creatures from the depths of space.

Some of the most popular cartoon characters have been licensed for use on them, though I'm not sure of the appeal to a child of breaking apart an image of his favorite super hero with a stick?

My own preference is for something fairly abstract like our simple fish design rather than something to which the child may have some sort of emotional attachment.

These instructions are for making a (very) simple fish. The same techniques can be adapted for many other characters.

I like the fish because:

Many of the materials can be discarded items

The rest are low cost

Making the fish is very easy.

Decorating the fish is also easy.

No special ability is required at any stage. After all, it's going to be broken up, not stuck to the wall in a glass case.

How To Do It

The first step is to decide, with your child's assistance, what character to make your piñata look like.

This is only limited by your imagination and your child will have plenty of that to spare.

You have to keep in mind your budget and level of artistic ability.

Then, you can both gather the materials you need to make your piñata.

1. A big balloon: The balloon can be round or any other shape which will be fairly easy to cover with your paper mache mixture.

2. Cardboard: You use this for the fins of the fish. If your piñata had legs, they'd be made from cardboard tubes which are also easy to find in most homes.

3. Newsprint: Or other paper for the paper mache. This must be torn into ragged edged strips. These will become the body (shell) of your piñata. You can also roll up any small pieces left over and glue them on to the outside as three dimensional eyes or, if you have some art ability, starfish or crabs.

4. Paint or coloring pencils: To color the piñata.

5. Wire: Some people make a loop through the body of the piñata which they can use to burst it open if the children are not able to break it easily.

6. Accessories: Box cutter, plastic bowl, thin twine, scissors, masking tape, and a pen.

7. Paste: I recommend that you buy a packet of prepared wallpaper paste from your hardware store but I'll include instructions for those readers that want to make their paste more cheaply in their own kitchen.

A suitable paste is easy to prepare from some water and ordinary flour.

Its main advantage is the low cost of the materials. The disadvantages are the smell, the mess any spills can create and the difficulty of getting the right consistency for best use.

The proportion of two water and one flour will have to be adjusted by adding either small quantities of flour or water to achieve the consistency that you want. Stir thoroughly and ensure that there are no lumps in your mixture

before using it.

You might be able to store the glue you have made in a sealed bowl in your refrigerator for up to a couple of days. I suggest that you make a new batch of glue each time.

- 1.** Tear as much newsprint as you think you will need to cover your balloon into strips about two inches wide. Tearing the strips will probably give better adhesion between the layers than the straight edges you would get if you cut each piece with a guillotine or scissors.
- 2.** Blow up your balloon.
- 3.** You need two cheap plastic bowls. The bowls should be ones that you don't mind getting marks on or damaged. Use one plastic bowl which is about the same diameter as the inflated balloon. Rest the balloon on top of the bowl.
- 3a.** The other bowl will be used to hold the wallpaper paste mixture that you coat the strips of newsprint with. Mix the paste and then start putting the strips into the mixture so that both sides are coated.
- 4.** Run each piece of newspaper at different angles across the balloon and the strips which you have already been applied. After you have covered the upper exposed area of the balloon, gently turn it over and apply strips over the other side as well.
- 5.** Add water as necessary to stop the paste mixture becoming thick and harder to work with.
- 6.** Keep the thickness of paper on the balloon as even as possible over the whole surface. Smooth any ridges while they are still wet.
- 7.** The paper will take up to two days to dry properly. Check it from time to time but it's better to let it dry than to finish decorating your Piñata while some of the paper is still damp below the surface.

- 8.** When the layers are dry, tape fins made of thin card to one end of the balloon (which will be the back) and a smaller one top the top side (which will be the dorsal fin).
- 9.** Fix the fins in place with masking tape and cover that with more newspaper strips. They will take paint better than the masking tape would.
- 10.** Cut along three sides of a four inch square in the center top of the fish to burst the ballon and make an opening which you can use to fill the piñata with sweets and novelties.
- 11.** After filling the piñata, close the door and paste some more paper strips over it. You could "cheat" and just use a few squares of newsprint instead of more thin strips at this stage.
- 12.** Draw the fish design on your piñata.
- 13.** Paint the piñata in bright colors. Keep the decorations large because small details will not be seen.
- 14.** Prepare the stick or sticks which will be used to demolish the shell of the Piñata.

Get some cheap plastic kid's art smocks for them to wear when they are hitting the piñata so that their clothes are not marked by paper dust or paint.

Holding Your Party at an Outside Venue

The advantages of having your party at a café, bowling alley, petting zoo or other venue are that you probably don't have to:

Prepare the food

Provide any special equipment

Clean up afterwards

You just have to:

Pay the bill. A deposit is usually required at the time of booking.

Organize transport to and from the venue.

Maintain a close watch on all the children – you'll need help.

You will need parents or other adult members of your family to help with parties at outside venues. Their presence may add to your costs but be well worthwhile.

While you are watching the main activity, you need at least one other person to monitor children that go to the toilets or other parts of the venue.

The presence and support of the staff who have experienced dozens or even hundreds of parties can be worth every penny but they cannot be caregivers for your guests to an extent that reduces the service to their other clients.

But, you need to do some checking before choosing the location for your party.

When thinking about possible venues, try to think beyond the usual ones which I've listed above.

Craft Studios, Dance Centers, Sport Centers and other places that teach children out of school hours may offer their facilities for your birthday party along with a session of practical work.

You need to find out as much as you can about alternatives in your area. Even if there is only one venue that you or your child prefers, it is worth your time to check the following points before confirming the booking.

Costs can be far more than you are quoted. The fee per child and adult is just one factor.

You need to find out what is included and what may be charged as extras.

The quoted fee may be for a set menu. Be sure to tell the parents of your guests that they will be responsible for any extras which they or their children get.

Most venues have a regular routine for the parties which are held there.

Check the guests off your list when they arrive. If you find that someone has brought any extra children, you can ask the adult for payment before the meal is started. If you don't know a child's name and it is not clear who brought them, just politely ask how they spell their last name and then follow up with the parent if that child is not on your list.

You should ask about:

Does the venue provide a Birthday cake (at extra cost?) or do you need to bring your own?

Are take-away bags, balloons or other party favors included in the price?

Can you add one or more guests at the last minute? It's very common for some parents to bring extra children to the event without advance notice. Sometimes, more parents than you expect will want to stay. You can ask them to pay the extra fees but you should confirm in advance whether or not the venue would be able to provide the extra seating, equipment and refreshments for your extra party guests.

What are the quiet periods? These could be a good choice to have your party so the staff can provide the best service and your group will have more space.

Is there a private area available? Obviously this is an extra cost but it might be worth checking out.

May I have a professional entertainer perform for my party at the venue?

Yes, you should ask the venue manager for approval before confirming the

booking. Most venues have no problems with that, but some will not permit it because of lack of space (serving other customers may be obstructed) or because of bad experiences with some performers in the past.

Who will be the staff member on duty that I can refer any problem to which the waiting staff are unable to handle?

If the venue provides some favors for the children, ask to see them first. I've got no problem with advertising stickers but you need to check the quality and likely appeal of the items which are included.

Take your family to the venue for a meal so that you can check the appearance and quality of what is provided.

Use a checklist to ensure that you take everything which you need to the venue. It is very easy to forget minor but important items which you would only have to go to the next room to get if you were holding the party at your home.

Here are a few:

Birthday candles

Film for cameras

Spare batteries

Facial tissues

Aspirin

Band-Aids®

Professional Entertainment

Professional entertainment is a feature of many parties. Some parents think it's essential but that not true.

The cost is likely to be significant, so careful checking is essential.

Ask other parents about their experiences and suggestions. If your child attends a party and says the entertainer was really good, contact the parents who organized that party for contact details and their own opinions; they will be able to tell you if the performer arrived late, used any inappropriate material or other matters which would not be evident or important to your child.

Ask your child about what sort of entertainment that they most enjoy.

If it would be appropriate for your home or the venue where the party will be held, check with a few people that offer that sort of program.

Even if you have strong recommendations about a particular performer, it's probably worth taking the time to check other offers from people with a similar speciality. This will give you a better idea of the level of fees in your area and also what different performers feature in their performances.

Ask these questions:

Can you refer me to some satisfied customers? Most performers will have testimonials from some of their happy clients. But, some won't because they never think to ask for them or their clients aren't likely to give them any.

You should also ask your friends and other parents you meet through the school for recommendations, especially if they have children of about the same age.

Ask the teachers and also the children's librarian at your local library too. Schools and libraries in many areas book entertainers from time to time.

Are you insured? You don't want to take risks with your children, guests or property. But, the main reason for this question is to indicate those

performers who treat their entertainment as a serious business. If they insure their activities, they probably also use professional-standard equipment and supplies and provide a quality level of performance. Insurance for balloon workers is fairly expensive which indicates the potential risk that these items can expose children and adults too.

It means nothing if someone says that they never had an accident because they are very careful. Injury to a child or damage to expensive furniture only takes a second and can happen to anyone.

What sort of things do you feature? A magician, balloon worker or clown won't describe every detail of their routines but they can give you an idea of the sort of routines they use. Face painters can tell you some of their best designs or confirm that they can create the designs which your children and their friends want most.

This will help you see how well their performance might fit with your children and the theme of the party.

Most performers will usually involve the birthday child in a feature item which provides an ideal time to take pictures or make a video.

May I photograph or make a video of the performance? This may seem a reasonable request and all performers are likely to cooperate with photographs during and after the performance if you ask them in advance, but some performers will not permit video recording.

This is usually because parents share the video with other families and the performance on video is not likely to be a good representation of the actual performance; the person taking the video is usually not experienced in filming live performances or aware of the best angles for each item.

Also, the performer's feature tricks and routines may lose some impact and the surprise element if most of those at your party have already seen the routine on an amateur video.

But, almost all performers will have a feature item that they involve the birthday child in which can be filmed.

More Party Tips

Get There First: Holding a party in a public park is becoming more popular because of the tight economy and the obvious health benefits. Some places have areas with barbecues etc which can be booked and paid for in advance. Other places have free facilities but they are only available on a first-come-gets it basis. If you have your eyes on one of the latter, make sure that one of your family or friends gets there early on the party date to hold the spot and confirm to you by mobile phone.

Your Party Checklists

These lists may contain more detail than you think you need because I try to cover almost everything which any reader might have in their planning.

I use a cardboard folder and a large notebook for lists like I put here for you.

If you are comfortable setting up a folder on your computer for all the details, messages and lists, then do it that way.

You will find a folder handy for all the bits of paper you will collect. I would still print a copy of anything important and put it in the folder as a precaution.

You can't really start planning your child's party too early. Good parties don't just happen!

I suggest that you start about two months before the big day. Talk with the birthday child about the sort of party they would like. It's too early to make promises to them but you need to know what is currently popular with them and their friends.

Then, you can start to put together your Plan.

The first item is a **Party Budget**. That has to fit into your family budget without putting any strain on other spending or your credit card.

List everything which you have to buy or hire for your child's party.

You'll probably adjust this as you go, deciding to change or drop some items as you get closer to the date of the event.

You may decide to make some items, with or without involving your children, instead of buying them ready-made. You still need to list the cost of the supplies which you need to make those items.

Keep in mind the amount of time everything will take.

Specify in your regular Diary when you will make a cake, design and make or print invitations etc.

You also need to allow time to interview entertainers and review venues etc.

Your Party Budget

Stationery

Envelopes \$ _____ : _____

Goodie Bags \$ _____ : _____

Invitations \$ _____ : _____

Postage \$ _____ : _____

Thankyou Cards \$ _____ : _____

Supplies

Balloons \$ _____ : _____

Banners and streamers \$ _____ : _____

Batteries \$ _____ : _____

Camera(s) and films \$ _____ : _____

Candles/lighter/matches \$ _____ : _____

Cups and (plastic) glasses \$ _____ : _____

Decorations \$ _____ : _____

Disposable cutlery \$ _____ : _____

Disposable tablecloths \$ _____ : _____

Hats and masks \$ _____ : _____

Serviettes \$ _____ : _____

Food:

Cake \$ _____ : _____

Snacks and fruit \$ _____ : _____

Sodas, fruit juice etc \$ _____ : _____

Sweets \$ _____ : _____

Games

Equipment or supplies \$ _____ : _____

Prizes \$ _____ : _____

Certificates \$ _____ : _____

Crafts

Equipment or supplies \$ _____ : _____

Aprons or Coveralls \$ _____ : _____

Clean-up supplies \$ _____ : _____

Hiring

Entertainment \$ _____ : _____

Furniture (chairs etc) \$ _____ : _____

Transport to and from venue \$ _____ : _____

Venue \$ _____ : _____

Insurance:

Insurance \$ _____ : _____

You may want to check that people who visit your home or are at the venue with you are covered by your home insurance third party risk (or similar name) or by the venue's insurance. If you need extra cover, your insurance agent may be able to write a cover note for the day of the event at little extra cost.

Your Party Schedule

8 Weeks

- ☐ Set Date ___ / ___ / ___
- ☐ Set Budget \$ _____
- ☐ Set Theme [_____]
- ☐ Set Location [_____]
- ☐ Contact and review venues and entertainers

6 Weeks

- ☐ Set Times [___:___ - ___:___]
- ☐ Guest List
- ☐ Make Invitations

5 Weeks

- ☐ Send Invitations

4 Weeks

- ☐ Check with Parents for RSVP's
- ☐ Start buying or making supplies.

2 Weeks

- ☐ Finalize Guest list.
- ☐ Finalize Games and prepare supplies.

☐ Order food or ingredients and other supplies.

1 Week

☐ Check with venue, entertainer and parents.

☐ Confirm what members of your family and other parents will be able to help you on the day

1 Day

☐ Finish all preparations.

Never leave anything, however minor, for the morning of the Party.

☐ Check all supplies.

☐ Check that pets will be looked after away from party.

Resources

I've mentioned most of these through the ebook but this list will give you them all in one handy spot.

Important:

I've listed a variety of programs, downloadable pages and web sites in this book to save you time, but I do not guarantee the usefulness, appropriateness or safety of the programs or the web sites in any way.

You should check the Terms of Use on any web site that you download any material from. That will tell you what you may and may not do with those materials.

Always check any computer files (programs and pictures etc) which you get with your anti-virus and anti-spyware programs before installing or using them. Free security programs are available from <http://free.grisoft.com/> and www.safer-networking.org/en/download/index.html

The web sites and other resources were available when I wrote this book in late 2009 and early 2010. But, I cannot guarantee that they will all remain available or that you will get the same information or experience which I report here.

Web sites may be abandoned, left to deteriorate or transferred to new ownership.

The owners may change the focus or content of the site in ways that nobody can forecast. Some may even introduce questionable material or even malware.

Some information on web sites may not be true.

Use of any of this information is entirely at your own risk.

I do not have any commercial relationship with the companies below.

Computer Programs

Serif Software programs (free): <http://www.freeserifsoftware.com>

This site offers older versions of Serif's programs for free download.

You can get desktop publishing, web page editing and other programs. The program files are fairly large.

You will also probably have to subscribe to the Serif Software email newsletter when you download the free programs but you can unsubscribe when you want to.

I have not downloaded the programs or used them recently so your use of them is entirely at your own risk.

Art Rage from <http://www.artrage.com> is a painting program for creating pictures and not for editing them. You might consider using it for creating decorations for your invitations and other materials for your party.

There is a free version of the program called the **Starter Edition** with less features than the paid versions which you can download from the web site. The free program has been downloaded more than one million times. I use it.

There are three versions of the commercial program with different features.



Tux Paint from

<http://www.tuxpaint.org/> is a free painting program designed for children between three and twelve. It is feature-rich and well worth trying

Photoscape from

<http://www.photoscape.org/> is a free image editing program

with many features.

Printable Birthday Cards and more.

Printable decorations for birthday invitations, cards, coloring pages and more can be downloaded from:

<http://www.dltk-kids.com/> This site is apparently a family project run by a couple with two children.

The <http://www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/birthday/cakes.html> and <http://www.dltk-kids.com/crafts/birthday/cakes.html> pages look very interesting.

<http://holidays.kaboose.com/birthday-color.html>

<http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=30&e=coloring> featuring characters from the Fisher-Price company's products.

<http://www.allcrafts.net/kids.htm> have links to printable decorations and craft projects etc. Many of these are on other sites, so please be very careful.

You can subscribe to their email newsletter of **Dover Publications** <http://www.doverpublishing.com/> and you will get links to quality downloadable sample designs and illustrations or instructions for crafts and games from different books every month and special offers.

Dover Publications is a long established publisher and their books cover subjects of interest to all ages.

Have a Great Time!

I hope that my book will help your next party to be your best ever and full of wonderful memories for your child and everyone else.

But, I hope this book helps you to be more confident in the stressful time before the party and to have a great time yourself on the day.

Best Wishes,

Martine Goodman.

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