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Toy Library

Birthday Party Ideas

April 2013

You want to celebrate your child's birthday with family and friends. How should you celebrate? What will the children enjoy doing? What is the most stress-free way to have a party?

- Keeping the numbers fairly small means that you (and therefore your child) will enjoy the day more.
- The duration of the party is perhaps the one area you can control fairly easily. Keeping it short, say an hour and a half for ages 1 to 4, two hours for ages 5 to 6, takes your child's needs into account as well as celebrating their special day.
- 5 and 6 year olds will enjoy being part of making or writing invitations, perhaps writing their friends' names and their own name. For the enthusiastic involve your child in doing thank you letters too.
- Include your child by hand delivering the invitations in person or posting them into the letterbox. (rather than handing them out at Playgroup, Kinder, Child Care or School)
- When having a group of children at your home, safety is of course paramount. Check gates and fences are secure and that the area can be enclosed. Remove any potential hazards from the house or garden and check any equipment being used is safe. Make sure there are no hot drinks. Parents can survive for 2 hours without one! And of course adequate adult supervision is essential!
- Boxed, named pre-organised food in little boxes or containers can free you up to supervise, play games and relax and enjoy! An example box could be: a labelled drink, tiny sandwich triangles, a small chipolata sausage, a piece of fairy bread, a few strawberries, orange segments. Children could sit picnic style to eat or in a circle on little cushions.
- Paper or cellophane bags can be used as take home lolly bags. They can be decorated with stickers and personalised with a name too.
- Ask guests to donate to your favorite charity instead of buying a gift - And besides you have the toy library! Some ideas could include:
 - The Smith Family – Sponsoring a disadvantaged child in Australia
 - World vision – Buy a child overseas a lamb, some pencils or some toys!



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- The Stonnington Toy Library – Maybe talk to Mary about your guests buying a great new toy for the toy library that could be used by your child and hundreds more!

“If your baby is born in warmer months, have your party in a nearby park. That way there's less cleaning up, you can leave when baby needs a nap and don't need to worry about noise of guests, and you don't need to deal with guests who overstay their welcome!” Kate Byrdy via Facebook

**Importantly, don't feel you have to do everything!
Keep it simple so that your child enjoys his/her special day.**

One Year Old

- Choose a time when your baby is usually at their happiest. Also morning tea or afternoon tea is less complicated than lunch.
- Create a baby friendly zone with a selection of toys or books, or outside on a picnic rug.
- A tunnel or cubby can be easily created by putting sheets over a table (great for peek-a-boo games)
- Use big or small boxes as cubbies or hidey holes. Turn them into favourite things – like a plane or a train for everyone to sit in!
- Soft balls in a container for putting in and out or for rolling or throwing
- Balloons at baby level (on the floor) are always fun, but watch carefully for dangers from popped balloons.
- Play some children's music like Play School's "Happy Birthday to you" or "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"
- If you have any older children attending the party and you'd like to have a game, a pass the parcel, musical statues or a hunt for 'treasures' in the garden.
- Often multiple celebrations are appropriate. For example, a morning tea celebration for all the Parents Group babies means you don't need to include them on the home party list. They might be relieved too!
- Borrow the Activity Garden from the Toy Library. 3 or 4 children can play with this at the one time whether sitting, crawling or standing. And they love posting at this age!

“Maybe combining the birthday and christening as one event? Might be a longer day... But it is two birds with one stone!” Kate Hely via Facebook



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Two Years Old

- Two year olds love to explore everything. An obstacle course with big pillows, beanbags to crawl over, chairs or table with sheets thrown over them, to crawl under.
- Blow some bubbles for them to chase and let them have a turn of blowing too!
- Provide lots of soft balls to throw and chase.
- Play some children's music and dance. You can play the "Freeze" game – when the music stops you "freeze". Or play music action songs like 'Row Row Row your Boat', 'Wheels on the Bus', 'Heads and Shoulders'.
- If you want to play a game make up a 'Pass the parcel' where everyone wins a prize preferably all the same. Your 2 year old will need help to play this game and might not understand sitting and waiting for taking turns yet, so only play this if you won't worry if they get up and walk away once they've got their prize. If you have older children attending the party, you may wish to include a game, like a 'treasure' hunt in the garden.

"It's a good idea to use different coloured paper for each layer in Pass the Parcel for this age. Then it is obvious when they need to stop unwrapping."

Áine Sommerfield via Facebook

- A table with plenty of playdough (a recipe for homemade playdough is available at the Toy Library) and some simple cutters.
- Borrow the Roller Coaster from the Toy Library. Children from 18 months really enjoy this toy!

Three Years Old

- Dressing up is fun for the three year old but it's better not to have a restricted theme, because some children wake up on the day and don't feel like putting on a specific dress-up. Asking guests to dress-up in their favourite thing solves that problem.
- Musical games like pass-the-parcel where everyone wins a prize which is preferably the same. (i.e.: no "winners" or "losers" at this age) Musical bops where you bop down when the music stops or freeze when the music stops. No-one needs to go out of the game, just keep it going with comments like "you were quick this time, Harry" or "I saw Zoe with her bottom down that time".
- If you do have a theme, pick something easy like a Jungle party. Most three year olds like animals! Hang a jungle of streamers in the doorway, play some "jungle" music like 'Leo the Lion' and 'I'm a great big Tiger'.



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- Another easy theme for this age is a “Colour” party. Ask the children to dress in your child’s favourite colour. Do some face painting using that colour, fill the rooms with balloons of the colour, have streamers of that colour to wave while dancing; even some of the food could be co-ordinated to the theme colour!
- Blowing bubbles - Having plenty of small containers with just a little bit of bubble mix in it means less arguments and also they’re less likely to spill it. Get them to chase the bubbles you blow as well.
- Set up a few activity stations such as a simple craft activity like mask decorating or stamps and paper. You can even keep to your party theme by using animal stamps/masks for the jungle theme. (Self inking stamps are less messy than ink pads.)
- Three is also a great age to borrow the Roller Coaster or Parachute from the Toy Library.

Four Years Old

- Four year olds are just beginning to really enjoy co-operative games, but they still don’t like to lose, so lots of games without “winners” or “losers” makes for a fun party.
- A treasure hunt in the garden or inside. The ‘treasure’ can be spread all over the garden or in a specific room or rooms inside and everyone can be sent to find it. Say at the beginning that it will all be put into a big basket to be shared at the end of the hunt, so there are no children who miss out. You can use wrapped lollies like Freddos or small gifts like bouncy balls for the ‘treasure’. (similar to an Easter Egg hunt)
- If you’d like a theme, a Teddy Bear’s Picnic is fun. Ask everyone to bring their favourite teddy bear, have some teddy bear races (where the child runs or hops holding their teddy bear), set up a teddy bear tea party on a picnic rug with a tea set and tiny teddy biscuits for children and teddy bears. You could set up an activity table where the children could make their own teddy bear mask, by colouring or decorating their mask with teddy bear stickers, sticking a paddle pop stick on the bottom to hold it. Or provide ribbons, crepe paper, sticky tape etc. and children could make a party outfit for their teddy.
- Musical games like pass the parcel, musical statues or musical bops are lots of fun. Everyone can “win” by not going out of the game. (see 3 year old)
- For a calmer, mess free cake time encourage the children to sit down together outside (weather permitting or in a specified area inside) and read them a couple of picture books while they eat.



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- Use big or small boxes as part of an obstacle course or paint them in the garden. Turn them into favourite things – like a plane or a train for everyone to sit in!
- Set up a craft activity
- Four year olds also love the Parachute from the Toy Library.

“Games such as 'Pin the Crown on the Princess' or 'Pin the Horn on the Unicorn' are great fun for 4 year olds” Áine Sommerfield via Facebook

Five Years Old

- A ‘treasure hunt’ with clues given to a group of children (break into small groups if you have a lot of children) You can give them the clue either as a picture (a drawing of the letterbox or tap) or written down for a bigger helper to read eg “The next clue is where you wash yourself” - the bath! Everyone rushes to the bath to find the next clue. The ‘treasure’ at the end can be made up of say wrapped lollies or chocolate coins and shared between everyone.
- Balloons hanging up in the garden with little treasures or lollies inside can be fun too. The children take turns to hit the balloons until they break and scatter the treasure below. A homemade piñata can be made from a balloon with wrapped lollies, confetti or feathers etc inside, then covered with paper mache (newspaper and glue) and painted and decorated if desired.
- Magic and fairies provide opportunities for imaginative play. Get the children to plant sticks in the garden and then when they come back outside they have turned into lollypops!
- Musical games are still huge fun, musical statues (as above) or pass the parcel. Still make everyone a winner and then there are no tears!
- Tie doughnuts on a string and hang them from the washing line. Children have to try to eat them but aren’t allowed to touch them with their hands.
- Pin the tail on the donkey (or whatever animal takes your fancy). A large donkey picture is stuck on a fence. One by one, children are given a tail with bluetak and then they are blindfolded.(Don’t use drawing pins at this age.) They have to stick the tail on the picture where they think the tail belongs. Five year olds think it is very funny when it is stuck in the wrong place!
- Set up an activity table with a more complex craft activity, decorating a small box or similar object to take home. Provide glue, some shiny paper or cellophane, some feathers, glitter, etc. You can get these from craft/discount shops.

Six Years Old



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- Egg and spoons races – (hard boil the eggs first unless you enjoy very messy play!)
- Sack races using hessian bags from the fruit shop
- Three legged races – tie their ankles together with old scarves (let them practice first to get their balance).
- Musical games – musical chairs or musical statues
- Set up an activity table with either threading a bracelet to take home or decorating a small box or similar object (see 5 year old). A lot of craft products are available quite reasonably from discount shops.
- An obstacle course set up with whatever outdoor things you can find eg: Climbing under an outdoor table, over boxes and try to incorporate activities to do in the obstacle course – eg: throwing balls through hoops hung on the clothes line, counting to twenty while hopping on one leg etc. (Hoops, Tactile Path, Stepping Stones, skipping rope are all available from the Toy Library to help with this)
- Another great theme is an “Olympic Games” party. (or Commonwealth Games?) Any races will do – children racing holding balloons between their knees, or any of the ideas above. Award a ‘Medal’ for each event, making sure every child is a winner! The theme could continue with the invitations and the party bags by rolling a piece of cardboard into a torch shape and then fill.
- If you want a theme, a spooky party with stories, use a blindfold and one at a time, get the children to feel a variety of gooey objects. You could let them guess what they are or for the very enthusiastic give them ideas eg: cooked spaghetti (guts), hard boiled egg (eyeball), jelly (whatever revolting thing you can think of!). These are the years of finding bodily functions hilarious, so don’t forget to include a few fun things along this line!