

## Age 1

Make no mistake: The first birthday party is really a celebration of the anniversary of your becoming a parent. While your one-year-old may enjoy a festive atmosphere, she will have no idea of what a party is. Many parents choose to make this a celebration for adults only. If you decide to invite other babies, be sure to keep the party short (under an hour) to accommodate nap schedules.

- Formal games are unnecessary. Blowing bubbles or singing songs will provide all the amusement little ones need.
- Be sure to take plenty of pictures of your child's frosting-coated face (photos will provide your child's only memory of the party).
- Keep it short.
- Don't bother buying a cute paper tablecloth and napkins. They'll probably just get eaten. Instead, go to an art-supply store and get blank white paper from a large roll. Cover a table completely with the paper, securing it with tape at the ends. Set a bunch of crayons on the table and watch the kids color their own table cloth.
- Be sure to host your small guests in a completely baby-proofed room.
- Avoid balloons, which present a choking hazard when they pop.

## Age 2

Hosting a party for two-year-olds presents unique challenges. They can go from anger to excitement in minutes — so you need to be prepared for a full range of emotions. Most twos are still very possessive of their toys; they may offer them to each other but will want them right back. It's best to put away your child's favorite toys before inviting a party full of friends over (sharing and taking turns will come later).

- It's best not to open gifts at the party since most guests won't understand that they can't take theirs home.
- Don't plan organized games since parallel play is all you can expect from most twos.
- Try sand, clay or water play activities since most twos like to work with their hands. Do some activities outdoors if possible since twos like making a mess.
- Be sure to host your small guests in a completely baby-proofed room since twos are adept at opening doors and finding hazards.
- Remember that lighted candles can be dangerous — make sure no bows, ruffles or pigtails are ignited.
- Avoid balloons, which present a choking hazard when they pop.

## Age 3

It's not until they hit three that children begin to really understand parties. Those who are used to group settings from preschool, daycare or playgroups usually love a chance to celebrate. (If your child is shy, however, keep that in mind when making your plan.)

- Singing and circle activities work better than group games for most threes.
- Threes like imitation, so try a simple version of Simon Says (without expecting them to know left from right).
- Threes usually enjoy playing with other children briefly but still have trouble cooperating. Don't expect too much of your guests.
- It's best not to open gifts at the party since most guests won't understand that they can't take theirs home.
- Keep the party to about 90 minutes to avoid over-stimulating them (and exhausting you).

## Age 4

Most fours are full of energy and imagination, which makes them wonderful (but exhausting) party-goers.

- Plan short games and keep things moving because fours may find it hard to wait their turn.
- Include music since most fours like silly songs and nonsense words.
- Treasure and scavenger hunts work well for this age group.
- Plan lots of active games, since fours have physical energy to burn.
- Plan for a party of about two hours.

## Age 5

Five-year-olds know parties are very important and may enjoy the planning even more than the event itself. That's why it's especially important to involve your five-year-old in the entire process. Theme parties work well.

- Fives especially enjoy dramatic play, so have some props on hand for make-believe games (a pizza parlor, a fire station, a bakery, etc).
- Fives are usually ready for games that teach right and left like Hokey-Pokey and Simon Says.
- While they're ready for organized games, some fives still have trouble taking turns, so plan accordingly.
- Most fives have the small motor skills necessary to use scissors and string beads so they're now ready for crafts that involve more than simple finger painting.
- Plan for a party of about two hours.

## Ages 6 to 8

Being with friends becomes increasingly important for 6-8 year olds so parties take on greater meaning. They're old enough to enjoy most organized games and have a well-developed sense of fairness.

- Children of this age have definite ideas about their parties. Listen to them (within reason!).
- Ages six and up are ready for parties outside the home if desired.
- Children can play games with rules like dominoes, cards, etc. (One family hosted a kids casino night for eights with great success.)
- Kids this age like secrets and mysteries, so consider games with clues and puzzles.
- Fewer children this age are fussy eaters, so you can take more chances with your menu.
- Parties should not exceed two-and-a-half hours.