

Kid's Birthday Party: Setting the Scene for Fun

Editor: Liz Johnson
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What's the biggest day of the year for any kid? His or her birthday! It's the one day of the year to ~~be~~ the center-of-attention... no questions asked. Our summertime birthday celebration has a colorful, *Day At The Beach* theme and is a perfect choice for either a boy or a girl turning about four, five or even six. It seems everywhere you turn these days, you find those paper and plastic sets of cheesy decorations and party favors with grinning television and movie characters to tempt your little one. Enough already! We found our initial inspiration in the vivid designs of Patty Young's new *Playdate* collection from Michael Miller Fabrics. When you create your own decorations and take-home gifts, you throw a party that is more memorable, more unique, and more green, because nearly all the elements are reusable.

It takes a little more planning and thinking ahead, but the result is worth it. And, by spreading out the tasks over about three weeks, you'll stay cool, calm and collected. At least until the day of the party when all the little guests start singing *Itsy Bitsy Spider* in unison, at the top of their lungs. Or... maybe that's your favorite part?!

Our thanks to our birthday pals at [Michael Miller Fabrics](#) for providing all of [Michael Miller blog](#).

3 weeks out



- Pick the date and time. Kids' parties generally don't need to last longer than about two hours.
- Choose your theme. Get the birthday boy/girl involved. Depending on the age, sometimes it's best to suggest two or three themes from which to choose rather than leaving it wide open. Unless you *really want* to try to put together an 'Invisible Dragon Party'.
- Create your guest list. Experts suggest matching the number of children with the age of the birthday boy or girl, ie. four guests at the party of a four year old. Sometime limiting the number of children can be a challenge, but everyone will have more fun if you err on the side of too few rather than too many.
- Arrange for adult help from friends or family if there'll be more than about 4-5 kids.
- Create your invitations to match your theme. You can either mail them, make a call, send an email invitation or walk next door and invite your neighbor. It's up to you; but, if you give at least 7 to 10 days notice, more people will be able to attend. Ask for a quick RSVP so you know as soon as possible how many children to expect.

2 weeks out



- Once you know the number of children attending, plan and shop for your final decorations, table settings and take home gifts. It is okay to call those who haven't responded to get an exact count.
- Shop for your fabric and notions or order them online.
- As soon as everything is in hand, start sewing. If you decide to make any of our Party projects (debuting later this week and next week), know that none of them take more than an afternoon to construct... even in multiples of 4-6.
- Plan your games and activities. Again, several of our Party projects are 'dual-duty', acting as both decoration and activity. Short, simple games are best for young children. Don't overlook the classics: Musical Chairs, Duck-Duck-Goose, Simon Says, and Pin The Tail On the Donkey (or Pin the Arm on the Starfish for our theme) have entertained kids for decades. It's also a good idea to have a few 'back-up' games ready. This way, if something planned turns out to

be a dud, you can cut your losses and move on the next game. It also gives you some activities to bring out in case you end up with extra time to fill before parents arrive. Remember to roll with the kiddie crowd. Never make a big deal if something you planned needs to be altered or shelved.

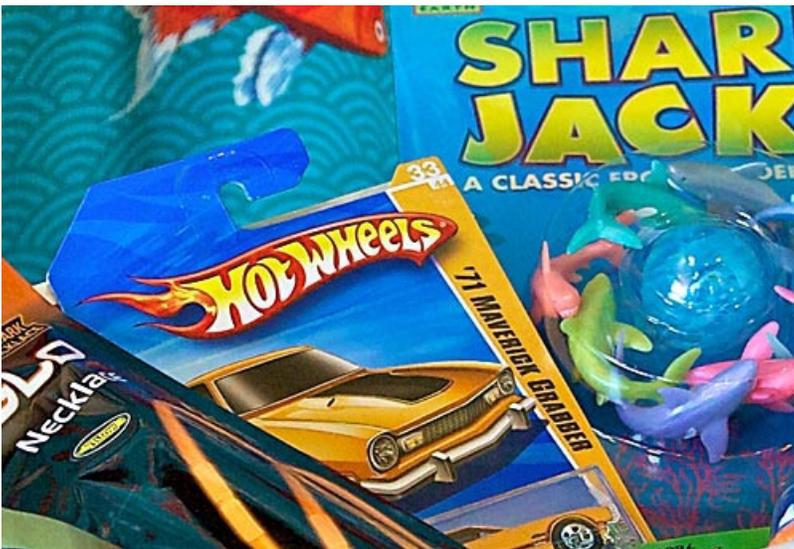
- Plan your menu. Keep things simple. Unlike adult parties that focus on the food, kids are usually too excited to eat much. Even the always-anticipated cake is often left behind on the plate with just a few bites taken. Finger food is best, like apple slices, cheese sticks, crackers, or tiny PB&J sandwiches. Unless you want the 'excitement level' to ramp up in a hurry, steer clear of oodles of sugary snacks.

1 week out



- Finish any final sewing projects. Prepare and press everything and store it safely away from view to keep it fresh for party day.
- Prepare anything on your menu that can be made ahead and frozen. This includes the cake.
- Write out a final schedule of activities. Start with games, then cake, then presents. Finish with a last game or activity if time allows.
- If the birthday boy or girl has siblings, plan how they will spend their day. If old enough, they can be helpers. Or, perhaps they'd have more fun spending the afternoon at a friend's house.

2 days prior



- Buy any remaining food needed for the menu.
- Buy any remaining prizes or decorations needed for your activities or table.

- Make sure you have plenty of batteries for your cameras.
- If you've decided to have helium-filled balloons at the party, order them early for pick up on the morning of party day.

1 day prior



- Clean and freshen the party area. It's easy to leave this until the last minute, but if you clean a day or so before the party everything is ready to go. Child-proof the area while you clean.
- Take any made-ahead food items out of the freezer to thaw.
- Put together the take-home gift bags, but hide them away in a cupboard or closet. It's best to take these out right before the party ends.

Party day



- Pick up balloons, if ordered.
- Pick up the cake if you didn't make it yourself. Make sure you have enough candles and matches.
- Prepare all the final menu items, including the drinks. Kids love 'mini ice buckets.' Filling a large plastic bowl with ice cubes and juice boxes is festive and fun.
- Protect the table. There are sure to be spills, so cover your table first with a laminated table cloth, then put down butcher paper... like in those fancy restaurants where creative types draw skyscraper designs around their water glasses. You can find large rolls of it at many craft stores. Simply tape the butcher paper to the table cloth; this makes the table itself an activity when you set out boxes or cups of crayons and chalk.
- Set the table. Kids love to come into the party room and see a fully decorated and set table, including the cake. Just

make sure to cover the cake with a clear lid to protect it from curious little fingers. You can make your own protective lid by cutting the bottom out of a gift box and replacing it with clear plastic wrap.

- Set out place cards or otherwise identify who will sit where. You can discuss this beforehand with your child. By having a special place set up in advance for each guest, you help prevent squabbling and hurt feelings when they realize it's physically impossible for everyone to sit next to the birthday boy/girl.
- Decorate the rest of the room as needed. Remember that your eye level is not kid's eye level. Decorations should be low enough for children to enjoy.
- Set up the materials and prizes for the games and activities.
- Have a special table cleared off and decorated to collect gifts.
- Set up the stereo with a set of rotating CDs with kid-friendly music.
- Answer the doorbell and let the fun begin!

After the fact



- Put your feet up and help your child wind down from the excitement of the day. Sitting together on the floor and looking through his/her gifts while discussing the party is a good way to bring things down a couple notches.
- Clean up. There are likely to have been a few spills and mishaps. Try to keep your sense of humor. You've just put on a wonderful celebration for your little one. If that means vacuuming up pulverized Goldfish® from the family room carpet... isn't that a small price to pay for his/her smile?
- Don't forget to have your child send thank you notes to everyone who attended. Depending on the age of your child, this will require some supervision and assistance from you, but let your child drive the wheel. He/She needs to learn the importance of a carefully prepared and genuine 'thank-you.'

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