

Complete Guide to Successful Children's Parties



Birthday parties should be lots of fun for everyone and a special day for you and your child to remember. However, children's parties often require an element of planning to ensure they are successful.

At Les Enfants we've created a guide to help you create fabulous parties for your little ones whilst avoiding potential problems.

1. Set a budget - how much are you willing to spend?

From £50 to a couple of hundred pounds, a few thousand pounds, or even more! This will help you to determine everything from the number of guests to invite to the type of event to hold.

You can create a perfectly lovely party on a shoestring. Or you can create an indulgent extravaganza that will have your children and friends talking for years. The Les Enfants team can offer advice for all budgets.

2. Make a date - weekday or weekend?

If your child's birthday conveniently falls on a weekend, hold the party on the day of the birthday itself. Alternatively, try to get it the weekend just before or just after. However remember that weekends book up fast, so consider having it during the week after school. Also bear in mind that with more parents working full-time, parties on a weekend can eat into family time.

There's nothing worse than two conflicting children's parties amongst the same group of friends. Try to find out whether any other parties have already been booked for your preferred date and get your invitations out early! If there is a conflict, you might want to talk to the other parent about sharing a party or discuss moving the date.

If your child is under 3, it's best to have a party that starts at around 10am and finishes by 12. This is usually the period when most toddlers are awake and happy. If your child is over 3, anytime goes but popular times are 11am -1pm, 2 - 4pm or 3 - 5pm.

3. The entertainment - themes, activities and entertainers

A theme helps tie a party together and differentiates your party from others. It could be as simple as a 'superhero dress up' party to a complete transformation of the venue. Put your thinking hat on and ask for your child's views. The most popular themes currently are pirates and princesses.



Remember everything can be themed - food, décor, outfits, party bags, games, cake. Let your imagination run wild.

A core element of your theme will be your entertainer. This is something you need to think about well in advance of the party (about two months) as they get booked up, particularly the popular ones. Whoever you book, ensure that they have public liability insurance and are CRB checked.

Also find out what their contingency plans are if they fall ill. Recommendations from friends are a good idea, or take up references and if you have the time see your entertainer in action.

If you don't want an entertainer, you can consider parties where the children get active - anything from go-karting to cooking, pottery painting to being a pop star. Even babies and toddlers get in on the act with baby gyms and toddler bounce parties.

For more ideas on what to do, go to www.lesenfants.co.uk

4. Location, location, location – where to hold it?

The thought of 20 ten year olds charging through your house probably doesn't fill you with deep joy. So consider these alternatives:

- indoor playcentres
- theme parks
- a marquèe in your garden
- leisure centres
- parks and farmyards
- function suites
- restaurants
- village halls
- bowling alleys
- ice rinks

Hiring a venue obviously adds to the cost but will prevent your furniture and carpets being destroyed. Make sure it's the right size for the numbers you're inviting and that it isn't too far away. Go and view the venue and investigate toilet, kitchen and parking facilities. Make sure you book enough set up time, particularly if you are planning a lot of theming.

5. RSVP – invitation etiquette

Invitations are a great way of giving a sneak preview of your theme. They can be simple store bought cards or home-made by someone creative in the family. The current trend is for printed invitations, personalised to your theme which can be printed as postcards or creatively presented scrolls.

Send them out well in advance to avoid conflicting party dates and to ensure a good turn out. Clearly state who is invited – whether it's all the children in the household or just one and whether parents are invited. Explain whether special clothing is required e.g. dressing up, swimming trunks, a change of clothes following messy activities.

Have an RSVP date you'd like people to respond by, giving yourself at least a week before the party date. Be warned - people are notoriously bad at responding to children's birthday party invitations. Les Enfants provides an RSVP service, saving you from making the chase up phone calls.

6. Numbers, numbers - how many guests do I invite?

If you have a limited budget, choose a few close friends and maybe a friend for their sibling. Consider that adults will be attending for under 4's. If you have a bit more to spend, consider inviting a larger group. Most school aged children will want to invite their entire class, particularly if that's the norm. Try not to have more than 30 children otherwise it gets difficult for the entertainer to maintain control. And remember, the entertainer is there to entertain, not to be a disciplinarian.



7. Tick tock - how long should it last?

For under threes, parties shouldn't last longer than 2 hours.

For three to fives, parties shouldn't last longer than 3 hours.

For over fives, you could have any length party – depending on your stamina – but avoid anything too long as you'll end up with a bunch of overtired children, not to mention how tired you'll be!

The normal party length is two hours.

8. Yummy – what to eat?

It's best to break for food in the middle of the party as it allows the children to refuel, have a toilet break and a drink. Create an attractive party table, possibly decorating the birthday child's chair in a special way.

Themed food boxes are a great way to give food to children in a contained way, without the fights that happen at a 'help yourself' buffet.

Health is a major issue for many parents these days who don't appreciate their child coming back from a party wired on e-numbers and sugar. However, a party should have special treats, consider some of these ideas:

- Shaped sandwiches (cheese or jam are the safest options)
- Cherry tomatoes and carrot sticks
- Crisps (e.g. mini Pringles or Organix)
- Cheese sticks
- Themed biscuit
- Raisins
- Mini yoghurt pots

Keep any extra sweets aside for party bags. For under threes, serve food that has reduced or no salt in it and limit sweets. Serve diluted fruit juice or water instead of fizzy pop or artificially sweetened concentrate.

Remember, some parents only want their children to eat organic food so you might want to bear that in mind when planning your menu. Also consider dietary requirements and allergies.

If you're having adults too, you'll need to provide some kind of catering for them. Nibbles and soft drinks (and occasionally a glass of wine or champagne) go down well.

If this is all too much, some of the large supermarkets do great platters or get a party caterer like Les Enfants to take it on.

9. Blow out the candles – the birthday cake

A cake with candles is still one of those quintessential party items. It's a great way to showcase your party theme – but if you're not adept at wielding an icing bag, leave it to a professional. Be warned, good cake decorators get booked up well in advance.

Large supermarkets also do a range of themed birthday cakes. You can choose from various fillings and can even get gluten or egg-free cakes. The latest trend from the US is to provide themed fairy cakes or biscuits in party boxes as an alternative to children receiving a squashed slice of cake.

10. Bag it up - the ins and outs of party bags

Party bags have become a contentious issue - they can add dramatically to the cost of a party and often contain badly made bits of plastic that just get thrown away. They are still worth having as they round off a party, capture a theme and the children look forward to them.

Consider buying just one nice item per bag - like a book or educational toy - with a few sweets thrown in, instead of lots of little things that end up in the bin. If you have a make and do party then the children can take home their creations as part of the party bag.



11. Pushing the boat out - party extras

There are some great surprises you can add to a party to create a special flair. Consider a face painter, a balloon sculptor, a chocolate fountain, a professional photographer or a pop-corn or candy floss machine. You might also want to consider hiring some party helpers to make the day flow smoothly.

For extra special events, you could hire a limousine to take the children to the party venue in style, hire out a cinema for a private viewing of a soon to be released film or get a celebrity involved e.g. a footballer to teach boys some skills.

12. Remember - say thank you

After the excitement is over, it's worth getting your child to write out thank you notes for gifts received. It's something easily forgotten but is an important final touch.

The Big Day - bringing it all together

Make sure you take with you:

- Knife and candles for the cake
- Blu Tack, scissors and sellotape to stick up your decorations
- Venue and entertainers details
- Mobile phone to contact parents - pen & paper for their number in case of an emergency
- Children's name stickers
- Rubbish bags to clear away
- Camera and video camera
- Willing friends and relations to help (allocate them tasks to avoid duplication)
- A designated friend to take the photos so you can enjoy the day

Get to the venue as early as possible, as you may have to move furniture and it always takes longer to set-up than you think. Keep your children away from the venue if possible as it makes the work easier and also has a nice surprise element for the birthday child.

Put a sign or balloon outside the venue if it is difficult to find or unclear where to go.

Set the party table out to the side so that you allow the most room for the children to run around freely. Keep the party food off the table until tea time but have drinks available throughout.

Know where the toilet is and whether there is a coat rail.

Put out chairs for the adults in one area away from the entertainment and near their nibbles. Mums tend to chat and this can be very distracting for an entertainer.

Set-up a small play area for babies in the corner with a suitable floor cover and toys.



As guests arrive give them name badges - this helps the entertainer.

Ensure there is no way the children can leave the venue without being seen by an adult.

Decide what time the entertainer is to start their main show. After fifteen minutes in is normally a good time to start.

Presents - allocate a present table and make sure the cards stay attached.

Once the party has started enjoy yourself but keep an eye on the children whose parents have left as you are responsible for them. Make sure you know when the entertainer will break for food and get the table ready.

At tea time help the children to open packs and give out extra drinks.

Offer the entertainer a drink and some food they are only human! A good entertainer will stay with the children during the break and not go off into a corner.

Bring out the cake and sing "Happy Birthday".

This is a really important part for the birthday child and a special moment for you, make sure you see it rather than being stuck helping in the kitchen.

Tears always happen and can be contagious. Take a tearful child away from the group to calm them down. For quieter children who don't like joining in, it's a good idea to set-up a colouring table.

At the end of the party make sure the entertainer has made it clear that there is a conclusion and ask them to give the party bags out with your child.

Once all the guests have gone pay the entertainer and, if they were good, a small tip is always much appreciated.

Clear the venue to its original state.

If you'd like advice on planning your child's party, please contact a member of the team at Les Enfants on:

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