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Ideas and hints for planning and running a children's party

Children's parties can be great fun for parents and children alike, but they can very easily turn into nightmares for overworked mums. Here are some hints and tips which you will find useful when organising your party.

Try to restrict the party to those children who are within a year or two of the birthday child's age. Seven year old Simon may play with his three year old sister at home, but neither he or his friends will want to play with younger children at a party.

If other parents attend the party, politely ask them not to chatter as this distracts the children from the entertainment. Ask them to sit and watch with the children and join in with the fun. Children enjoy the show much more when Mum and Dad are taking part as well.

Consider how many excited children you can realistically manage in the space you have and ask other adults to help if necessary. An extra pair of hands is useful when serving food and refilling drinks.

Parents put in a lot of hard work at parties, but much of this is wasted if the food that you have prepared is not eaten. The trick is to keep the food simple and not have too many choices. Children will often ignore the expensive and carefully made food and sandwiches, but they will devour such things as sausages, crisps, hula hoops, chips, burgers, pizza, ice cream, jellies and cakes.

Children filled with fizzy drinks often erupt later leaving you a nasty mess to clear up. Some children also become hyperactive after consuming certain foods, so be prepared.

If you are going to hire a children's entertainer, check that they are a member of a recognised magical society such as the International Brotherhood of Magicians or the Magic Circle. These societies have a strict entrance examination which should help to ensure that you will be getting a competent performer.

Check that the entertainer is covered by public liability insurance and is fully DBS / CRB certified for working with children and young people. This is important! It is also essential that another adult is in the room at all times in case of accident or illness. Book the entertainer well in advance of your party to ensure that they are not already booked elsewhere.

I have found over the years that 2 1/2 hours is more than ample for a really good party for four to ten year olds. This gives time for games, food and entertainment within their attention span.

If you are going to hire a bouncy castle or ball pit, ensure that you are covered by insurance, in case one of the children is injured while using it under your supervision.

Most restaurants and burger bars do not employ professional entertainers, they simply use members of staff to keep the children amused. However, they will often allow you to hire in your own entertainer.

Fancy dress is a good idea for older children, but please advise the parents on safety, (crepe and tissue paper burn nicely, metal swords and fairy wands can be dangerous in confined spaces) or get advice from a local costume shop.

If you want a good party, plan it, keep it simple, keep it short. Restrict the age range and the numbers. Don't do it all on your own. If you want peace of mind and you feel you can afford it, book a good professional children's entertainer. This will keep them amused and out of your hair while you prepare the food and