Child’s At-Home Birthday Party Checklist

Whether you’re celebrating indoors or in the backyard, with pin the tail on the donkey or an entire petting zoo, this timeline will make for a very happy birthday with all the bases covered.



One to Three Months Before

- [ ] **Discuss with your child what kind of party he or she wants.**- Dinosaur party? A celebration of all things Dora? Let your child help pick; the theme will help narrow down decoration and activity choices.
- [ ] **Decide whom to invite**. - Do you need to ask the entire class, or does your child just want his six best friends? The type of party may dictate how many kids you can host (in other words, a Guitar Hero competition may work best with fewer contestants).
- [ ] **Line up any entertainment you may want.** - The earlier the better—it’s no fun telling your child that the magician she has her heart set on is already booked. Ask for references of people who have used the entertainers recently, and check up. Be sure to ask if there are any setup requirements.

Four Weeks Before

- [ ] **Before setting a date, check with essential guests to make sure they’re available.**- Your child won’t be happy if his best friend is going to be out of town.
- [ ] **Send invitations.** - Make written invitations creative and coordinated with the party theme. Indicate whether parents are invited to stay (parents of toddlers should remain), and include an RSVP date and start and end times.
- [ ] **Make a schedule of activities for the party.**- Plan to fill two to three hours with a mix of energetic games and calmer activities (like crafts or storytelling). You also need to factor in time for entertainment, snacks, and general freewheeling ruckus. If the presents will be opened, save that for the end; if you start running out of time, you can skip it. Keep in mind that an outdoor party may become an indoor party in case of rain, so plan alternate, rainy-day activities, just in case.
- [ ] **Make a master list of supplies you’ll need.**- Make sure you have the following covered, and note if you need to buy or borrow anything. Check online party ware sources like plumparty.com and discountschoolsupply.com to save time.

Possible Supplies: -game and craft essentials -music -sports equipment -portable tables to hold food or presents -coolers and serving dishes -tablecloths, plates, cups, and utensils

- [ ] **Buy or order party favors that fit the theme (and goody bags to put them in) and prizes for the games.**

Three Weeks Before

- [ ] **Plan the menu.** - Keep it simple—finger foods, pizza, things kids actually like are super easy and sure to please. If you like, plan a few special treats (like a cocktail) for parents. Make a list of how far in advance each dish can be made.
- [ ] **Make a grocery list.**
- [ ] **Line up any help you may need.** - Enlist friends, older children, other relatives, or parents of party guests to help supervise activities. Consider hiring a high school student, your baby-sitter, or a professional to help with pre- or post-party cleaning or to help supervise games, replenish food, and generally take some weight off your shoulders.

One Week Before

- [ ] **Clean the house thoroughly**. - This way, you'll need only a quick once-over before the party.
- [ ] **For an outdoor party, do any major yard cleanup or planting.**
- [ ] Follow up on RSVP stragglers to get a final count.
- [ ] **Develop a detailed cooking schedule** - Make any foods that can be frozen.
- [ ] **Order the cake.** - If you are making it from scratch, bake the layers and freeze them (you'll ice it the day before the party).
- [ ] **Order balloons.**
- [ ] **Check your list of needed supplies and procure any missing pieces.**

Three Days Before

- [ ] **Find a place for coats.** - Make space in a hall closet and fill it with presentable hangers or designate a bed for coats (and make sure the room's free of breakables).
- [ ] **Go grocery shopping.**
- [ ] **Do a safety run-through of the house and yard.**- Make sure danger areas like stairs and upper-floor windows (and pools) are safeguarded, double check that any chemicals are locked away, and check for sharp-edged corners on furniture that might be dangerous.
- [ ] **Prepare the cameras.** - Charge video and digital cameras. Stock up on extra film or memory cards.
- [ ] **Prepare goody bags.**

One Day Before

- [ ] **For an outdoor party, mow the lawn and tidy the yard.**
- [ ] **Organize the furniture.** - Set up dining and gift tables and activity stations. If you find you're missing anything (pencils for games, etc.), you have time to run out and get it.

- [ ] **Decorate! -** Do everything that doesn't involve helium.
- [ ] **Finish as much of the cooking as you can.**- This includes defrosting and icing the cake if you froze one. Also, for any foods that require cooking on party day, do as much prep (dicing, marinating, rinsing lettuce) as possible.
- [ ] **Do a touch-up cleaning sweep through the house.**
- [ ] **If opening presents is on the agenda, practice polite "thank you's" with your child.**

Day of the Party

- [ ] **Finish any last-minute cooking.**
- [ ] **Pick up cake and balloons, if ordered.**
- [ ] **Display food.** - One to two hours before guests arrive, set out foods that won't spoil. Wrap them tightly to ensure freshness; tear off the wrap when the first doorbell rings
- [ ] **Give parents who are staying tasks to oversee.**They can help with games or supervise a craft, so you're free to run the show and keep kids from running amok.
- [ ] **Serve the cake and ice cream.** The birthday child gets the first slice of cake!
- [ ] **Make a list of gifts and who gave them.**
- [ ] **Send everyone off with party favors.** - Your child can hand them out and say thank you at the same time.

Two to Three Days Later

- [ ] **Help your child send thank-you notes, and send your own to your helpers.**

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