

Celebrating Your Child's Birthday

"In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."—Abraham Lincoln, U.S. President

Your child's birthday is coming up. How can you make it a memorable, asset-building birthday? Empower your child to be involved every step of the way and infuse more creativity into the special event.

Try it...

For all parents

- Start planning your child's birthday at least one month in advance. Give your child time to consider various ways to celebrate before making a final decision.
- Set a budget for the birthday party (and also for birthday present spending) before you get too far into the planning. It's too easy to get caught up in the excitement and overspend. For more ideas, visit http://www.parenthood.com/article-topics/article-topics.php?Article_ID=4224.
- Consider three aspects of the celebration: the one with your family, the one with friends, and the one with extended family (such as grandparents). When children are younger, it's often easy to combine all these aspects into one event, but it becomes more difficult to do this as kids get older.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Don't be surprised if your young child gets more excited about the wrapping paper and the boxes than in the presents. This is common for infants, toddlers, and young preschoolers.
- If you have a children's birthday party, keep the party relatively short and away from nap times. Invite a small number of people so that your child doesn't get overwhelmed.
- Give your child simple choices when planning his or her birthday party. For example: Do you want a Dora (from the TV show "Dora the Explorer") or Maisy (from the book series by Lucy Cousins) party? Or do you want a train (from the book *Chugga, Chugga, Choo, Choo* by Kevin Lewis) or a Bob the Builder party (from the TV series)?

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Help your child plan a more structured friend birthday party. Together create an invitation list, games to play, and the type of refreshments to serve. For ideas on

games, party themes, and more, visit <http://familyfun.go.com/parties/>.

- Read aloud the book *On the Day You Were Born* by Debra Frasier. Read it aloud every year on your child's birthday.
- Encourage children to create a birthday wish list of what they would like to receive. Talk about how there's a budget and that they will not receive everything they wish for. Help them prioritize which gift ideas are most important and why.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Be aware that children sometimes go through a phase where they become ambivalent about birthday parties with their friends (or suddenly don't want to have one). This is more about their changing friendships and expectations than about not wanting to celebrate their birthday. Be patient and gentle during these times.
- Help your children think of new ways to celebrate their birthday as they get older. Many know they don't want to celebrate like they did when they were younger, but they don't know what other options they have. For example, consider having a slumber birthday party, a video-game-playing birthday party, or a party where artistic kids visit a museum and go out for pizza afterward or athletic kids take in a professional game.
- Encourage the birthday child to think of others—in addition to himself or herself. Teach children to take a portion of money they receive as a gift and donate it to a charitable cause they care about. Or have everyone who is invited bring a food donation for a food shelf.
- Consider also celebrating your child's birthday as just your family—or as a one-on-one time with one parent. Take your child out for breakfast, out for ice cream, or for something special to celebrate.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Follow your teenager's temperament when it comes to planning a teenage birthday party. Some are quite social and want to have a lot of friends over. Others prefer a quiet birthday by going out to eat with one close friend.
 - Make a list of famous people who were born on your child's birthday, not just media stars but people who have made a difference in the world. Place "birthdays" and the date of your child's birthday (such as July 21) into a search engine, and other famous people's names will come up. Together talk about what these famous people did to deserve being remembered. Then think of the birthday not only as a day to celebrate but also as a day to rededicate yourself to doing good for others.
 - Older teenagers like to celebrate the new freedoms that come with the age, such as being able to get a driver's license at age 16 and not having a community-imposed curfew at age 18. Celebrate these milestones but also continue to negotiate boundaries since you don't want your 18-year-old staying out all night.
 - Point out what makes you proud about your teenager on his or her birthday. Everyone likes to hear about their strengths and the progress they're making. A birthday is a great day to talk about the positive steps your teenager is making.
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