

THE PSP GUIDE TO BIRTHDAY PARTIES

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A Birthday Party is a wonderful way to celebrate the birth of a child. However, for some people it can be fraught with stress, from where to have it, to whom to invite. We asked PSP members about their birthday party planning experiences and tips in our Birthday Party Survey 2012. We've pulled together the information supplied by our wonderful parents and created The PSP Guide to Birthday Parties. We hope it helps in making your parties hassle-free and enjoyable.

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PARTY GOALS

Before embarking on planning your party, think carefully about what type of party you are looking to host. Honing in on your priorities and ultimate party goals will help you make better decisions on how to meet those goals. Here is some advice from PSP Parents:

Does a one-year-old need a party with a lot of people? *"Large groups can be overwhelming for young children, so if you are throwing a big shindig because you feel like you need to invite the whole kettle of fish, you may find that your child is over-stimulated and crying."*

"With young children, I've found that fewer people (adults and kids) make them more comfortable. I try to remind myself that this party is for the child and not for me".

"Don't overdo it. Especially when they are younger as they do not get the significance of birthdays yet. Just honoring the birthday is the big thing!"

Does the party mean more than just a child's birthday? *"I'm proud of the fact that I kept this baby alive for a year and I think that deserves a celebration!"*

Perhaps your idea of a child's party is more like a play date? *"To me, the best parties are having their closest friends over to the house for something low-key."*

Hosting separate parties to make sure everyone is included. *"Divide and conquer. We do a separate gathering for grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins over a weekend late afternoon relaxing with games, dinner (catered), cake and presents. Then, a friend dinner and/or sleepover party the following weekend with 2-3 of my child's closest friends. Full class celebration is done in school with parent visiting classroom with a treat and a book to read/donate."*

Keep your goal realistic. *"I think parties have gotten totally out of control. They cost too much, moms get completely stressed out, kids' expectations are too high, etc."*

"Space determines the number of guests we invite. Once the guest list is sorted, planning the time so there is a flow of activities to keep everyone occupied and enjoying themselves is probably the most important aspect of hosting our party."

The bottom line. *"Do what's comfortable for you, your children and what you can afford. It's supposed to be fun! Don't worry about inviting the whole class. Don't drive yourself nuts over scheduling the whole party. Part of the fun is just having all the children together."*

GUEST LIST

Who to invite is one of the stressful things about birthday party planning. As one PSP member advised, *"Always plan your invitation list first--as that will dictate venue"*. This is one strategy, whereas other parents have said, figure out where to have it and then decide on the guest list. Again, being clear with your party priorities should help a little with your guest list. PSP parents had a lot to say about invitations, so read on.

Is there a "rule" about how many to invite? "There is an "age plus one rule", which says you should invite the number of kids based on the age of your child plus one more child. So if you're child is turning two, invite no more than 3 kids. The Birthday Survey does not actually reflect this, but the advice to *"keep it small"* is clear throughout the survey answers. Here are a few quotes:

"In retrospect we invited way too many people, it turned into a huge production. There is a kiddie party industrial machine in NYC and it's sickening. We totally bought into it and we regret having done it. I would advise a small intimate party at HOME with just a handful of the child's closest friends."

"The worst child parties we've been to have all suffered the same problem---too many guests. That's why we chose to just invite our daughter's closest pals from school."

Do I have to invite the whole class or Mommy's Group? One source of angst is whether to invite the whole class if your child is in school or daycare. The majority of our parents agreed not inviting the whole class is the way to go. *"Avoid 'invite' politics if you can -- invite who your kid really likes."*

"Invite who you want to invite not who think you should invite."

"Don't be afraid to exclude people--for a child's party, people really do understand if the categories of inclusion/exclusion make sense (only family plus 2 friends, only friends, no family, etc.)"

There are dissenting voices on this issue, though, so we want to present that side as well. As one mom said, *"When kids are in preschool I think it's important to invite the whole class -- kids TALK!"*

In terms of Mommy Groups: Consider having everyone pitch in \$25 and renting a big space for a "Month Party" (e.g., April 2012 Babies). It's great to get them all together in a bigger space and means that you can limit your own party's guest list to fewer people.

Drop-off parties start happening around 5. Like winning the lottery for some parents, two hours of uninterrupted time without your child can be fabulous for parents of guests! For the host it means fewer parents and siblings to feed and entertain. Be prepared for a parent or two however, some children take some time to settle into being dropped off.

Speaking of siblings... it's not "required" to include the siblings. Don't feel pressured since it can be a nice way for siblings to get some space from each other and develop their own friendships.

Sleepover parties. Sleepover parties happen as early as 8, but they really start in full swing around 10. These can be good if you limit the number of kids and is a great way for the kids to be part of the hosting.

WHERE TO HAVE THE PARTY

Okay, next is deciding on where to have the party, the pros and cons of a venue vs. home or the park.

Having a Party at a Venue

1. The main reason parents say they have a venue party is that it can hold the number of people they need to invite. Also, the mess stays at the venue, no stains on your furniture, and you don't have to clean (and clean and clean) before the party and after the party.
2. You can also capitalize on an activity that your child likes to do, like karate, science, or cooking. Or even try something new like bouncing around, car racing or pottery!
3. A packaged party at a venue means you don't have to do anything, or very little.
4. You have a definitive time for the party, if that's your goal, with few stragglers.

However, you have to realize that you've got to pay for the convenience. Some of these parties can run you \$30 or more per child, and you often get little time to mingle and finish conversations as you are being moved on by the corporate "party host" to make space for the next party coming in.

"Using a place that is well-equipped for birthdays and has a system in place is well worth the extra money!"

"I don't think pricey package parties are really appropriate for small kids. They're so happy with balloons, presents and cake more elaborate things seem unnecessary and as I say, no fun for the chaperones."

"My son didn't really grasp the idea of a party at 3 years old. He was more interested in the cake, and getting presents later (we did not open presents at the party). Out of the 12 kids who came, my son played with the same 3 he was most familiar with. I feel like I could've just done a smaller thing. It's only now that he's older that he is starting to care about the details."

"We actually did "half venue, half home"--we went to a show at the puppet place, then returned to our house for cake. Since we only had four kids, we were able to keep costs down and keep things simple."

If you decide to go the venue route you'll need to secure the venue about 3 months out. PSP has a list of REVIEWED [party venues](#). DISCLAIMER: The PSP website is NOT a yellow pages of locations; it's a resource based on those venues people have used and recommended (or not).

Having a Party at Home

- If your child doesn't do well with strange environments, a party at home can make them more comfortable.
- You can also engage your child in the party planning so he/she can feel like they have more input beyond just the venue. As one parent said, *"Having it at home enabled me and my daughter to plan a lot of the details, and to do activities that you can't do at most of the commercial venues."*
- You also have more flexibility in what you do at the party. You can play games, or hire an entertainer, for example.
- Don't assume that your apartment is too small to host a party. Park Slopers are well-adapted to

entertaining and being entertained in tiny places. The kids don't care anyway.

- Having a party at the house, if planned well, can also allow for a casual atmosphere that doesn't reek of the "birthday party machine."
- Another real advantage of hosting a party at home is that you can use your own tableware! No plastic forks or disposable plates, it's all there in your kitchen cabinets.
- If you keep it simple it can definitely be more cost-effective than doing it at one of the venues.

However, a PSP member said, don't assume that home is always cheaper. *"I'd strongly advise against doing it at home - I found that we didn't really save money that way and our apartment was a mess after."* Keeping it simple requires you not to spend hundreds of dollars on fancy food for parents and different food for kids. There are sometimes hidden costs of a home party that you don't think about when you're planning a home party (wine/beer for parents that you wouldn't have at a venue; entertainment to come to your home such as a face painter or magician; time/cost of cleanup).

Having a Party in the Park

Having a party in Prospect Park (if your child is born in warmer months) can have the benefits of a lot of space without the hassle of having a party at home. If you have more than 20 people, you'll need to apply for a Park Special Event Permit (\$25), which you can now do [online](#).

If you are expecting to get one of the tables in the park, get your sleeping bags. In the summer months those spots (especially the ones with bbqs) are staked out at about 7am. You can always have a party on one of the grassy areas (by the Tot Lot is good; also by the 15th Street entrance by the road) but you'll need to plan to be bringing your own tables. See Appendix 3, pg. 13 for more details about hosting a Park Party.

The big unknown about outdoor parties is weather. You can say "rain or shine", or put "weather permitting" on the invite for your "lower priority guests" and move the party to your house for a smaller group if it rains. Adding "rain date TBD" to the invite is also a way to schedule around the weather, but realize that your guest list can change dramatically when rescheduling at the last minute.

Other possibilities:

If your building has a common room, having a party there has the benefits of being close to home without the mess!

If you have relatives or close friends, see if they would be willing to host for you. Make sure they know what it means to host a children's birthday party!

Consider having a "play date" party after school. Bring the guests back after school and have games, snacks and cake.

LENGTH, TIME AND DATE

When the children are four and under, go for a maximum of 2 hours.

Preschoolers. *"It's very important in my opinion -- for an infant, toddler, or preschooler party, keep it at 2 hours max. 10:00 or 10:30 am to noon or 12:30ish is a great time to do it because the children are in good moods (not tired), parents love an activity at that hour, and you can send kids home for lunch, nap, etc. Have structure to the party -- 15 minutes to trickle in, 30 minutes of free play, 30 minutes of cake, bye-bye. That way you hit all the high notes and avoid tantrums due to over-stimulation or fatigue. I've been to too many parties that were too long or over-ambitious. Keep them short-ish and sweet."*

"Keep it short, short, short! I had what I thought would be a come-and-go style gathering for my daughter's first birthday. People showed up mid-way through the allotted time (12-4) and stayed 2 hours after it was supposed to be over."

Older kids. When kids are five plus you can start the longer parties that don't need as much hand-holding. Drop-offs are great for families but remember some children still won't be ready to be left, so make sure you have a coffee or two ready for the parents who must stick around.

For younger kids working around a nap schedule is really helpful, but also planning your party so it doesn't take up the whole family day is another factor to keep in mind.

Dates Check school calendars before booking the date of your party. (NOTE: Public and private school holidays are different. Even if the children are too young for school, the siblings may have holidays and therefore the whole family may go out of town.)

INVITATIONS

Sending invites via email is the new norm, so don't worry about paper invites. From our Birthday Survey it's pretty clear that, at least with the younger kids, paper invites and snail mail are out. Less than 1 in 5 parents (18%) sent invites via snail mail. Online party planning websites (58%) and via email (29%) are much more common. Paperless Post, Evite, and even Google Calendar are great ways to invite people and keep track of who is coming, send reminders and more.

Be forewarned, over one-third of people said they had to re-contact people who hadn't RSVP'd. So assume that you'll need to do some extra leg work after sending the invites. Look at the sent, delivered and open rates on online invitations, as some people's spam filters trap these types of emails. Follow up with an email/text/phone call if you don't get an RSVP.

To save time, make sure to include the following information in your invitation:

- Whether siblings are welcome.
- If it's a drop-off party.
- If there is a one parent limit.
- The last date for RSVPs. You can state clearly that you are ordering, booking party resources and entertainment and a quick RSVP is appreciated.
- If there are things served for dietary and allergy limitations.

THANK YOU NOTES

There are different approaches to thanking people (or not)! 55% of our survey respondents said they still send out paper thank you notes, but this percentage reduces as the children get older.

Here are some comments from parents:

"Had child draw pictures on outside of blank cards. We wrote thank you notes inside and delivered them to guest's cubbies at school."

"We thanked each guest at their arrival and departure, but since we had a strict no-gift policy, we felt no additional thank-yous were needed."

"My child made one thank you card that I copied and personalized for each recipient."

"I was not organized/timely enough to get all the thank you notes out in time."

GOODIE BAGS, FAVORS AND GIFTS

Most kids still expect goodie bags and most parents still supply them, but that doesn't mean you have to have them. If you do decide to have them, here are some ideas about how to make them more (or less) than the traditional bag full of candy and plastic toys.

- Just say "No" to goodie bags. *"While I like to think that goodie bags come from good intentions, I can't help to think that a large part of it comes from the herd mentality of everyone does it, so must I."*
- If you are running a series of games with prizes after each one, an option is to win stickers for each game played and collect one prize at the end of all the games.
- Consider other alternatives. Just one favor or a theme related item.

"I felt that that (one toy) was more meaningful than a bag with plastic toys and candy, and it was probably mildly more environmentally conscious. But I am sure that we could do away with goodie anything altogether."

"One of the best "goodie bag" substitutes we've gotten was a nice-sized container of sidewalk chalk."

"We had a party and took instant Polaroid's of the kids at the party."

"My kids have been to a few parties recently where the "goodie" was a book, related to the theme of the party."

- Games equipment can also double as prizes such as, eyeballs from a Halloween eyeball and spoon race, a hula hoop from an obstacle course or gold coins from a treasure hunt.
- *"A few years ago we had a 'no gift' party for my 5-year-old. We didn't miss the gifts".*
- It's useful to have spare goodie bags for siblings or non-rsvpers that turn up on the day.

- Use the craft as the goodie bag."

Cotton produce bags (Food Coop) and a set of fabric crayons make for a fun craft, and double up as the goodie bag as well.

"I bought treasure chests made from paper and cardboard made in this country that the kids decorated at the birthday party with fake gems."

"Last year I did a project where all the kids painted/decorated their own t-shirts. The shirts were their favors."

- If you have a piñata full of small toys, hand out bags to fill, that can be the goodie bag they take with them. (NOTE: Stick to non-hard candy in the piñata. Lollipops beaten with a bat or stick ends up creating a massive sticky mess and broken pieces everywhere!)

GAMES, ACTIVITIES, AND ENTERTAINMENT

Whether you invite a few close friends of your child, or hoards of children, it's often best to have a few activities planned to help them engage in playing and to create a party-like atmosphere. The simple games are the best, and remember to focus on making the activities age appropriate. Here are some ideas from our parents:

- *"Pass the Parcel Game." (Wrap a present in different layers, pass it around to music, when the music stops the person holding the package gets to open a layer).*
- *"Wrap a Beanie Baby Balancing Limbo: Kids walk (in circles or around the house...) with a beanie baby balancing on their head and end up doing the limbo with fun dance music -- use a ribbon or string or broom handle."*
- *"Pin the _____ on the _____ (tail on the donkey, crown on the princess, horn on the unicorn)."*
- *"Guess the item: A game I did that I remembered from my own childhood put a bunch of simple objects (a whisk, a spoon, a yo-yo, a plastic dinosaur (that you got in a previous goody-bag), a ball, a small stuffed animal...) into a bag with a small opening. Kids sit in a circle, each child puts their hand in the bag, grabs an object, and by touch makes a guess as to what it is, pulls it out, laughter and ohhhhs. Simple."*
- Treasure and scavenger hunts.
- Races and obstacle courses.
- Knockdown tin cans and fishing games.

"I feel like kids don't need that much to entertain themselves. We had about 8 kids ages 1-5. I feel like they would have been able to entertain themselves with just balloons. We also had cars, trucks and beads along with music on an iPod. It seemed more than adequate in terms of entertainment."

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember the party is supposed to be fun. If the planner (usually Mom) isn't having fun and is a stressed out mess, it's going to rub off on the birthday kid, guests, and family. **Kids just want to feel special and that doesn't take a big party.** It can be as simple as decorating a "birthday chair" (streamers, balloons, etc.) that they get to sit at for breakfast, lunch and dinner, picking out the type of cake they want, or doing something out of the ordinary like eating cake for breakfast!

Here are some other thoughts:

"Don't over-plan or under-plan! Have a couple of activities ready but don't expect the kids to cooperate. Try to relax. Serve wine for the parents!!!"

"Don't fret or over do it. Kids are happy just playing with each other."

"Take your child's lead. Don't do any more than your kids ask for."

"I think parents make the best entertainers. You know your child and their friends and what sort of activities they like."

"Somehow, at 5 years old, parties suddenly turned gender specific. Wish I'd followed my gut and invited all the boys we knew, rather than having some girls replace boys. While no one appeared offended, I was worried about offending people by excluding them and the gender split, while sexist, is generally an easy and clearly delineated one that is judgment-free."

"Themes get more fun as kids get older and more able to participate in planning games, favors, etc."

See Appendix 3, pg. 13 for information on Park Party activities and games.

Online sites such as [Kaboose](#) and [Birthday Party Ideas](#) are useful in planning your party activities.

Appendix 1

Suggested **TIMELINE** before the birthday party date:

- 3 months** Discuss a Big Party with Mommy Group folks (if applicable)
Secure Party Venue/Entertainment
- 6 weeks** Send "save the date" email
- 4 weeks** Order goodie bags and decorations items
File Park Permit if a Prospect Park Party of more than 20 people
- 3 weeks** Follow up with Online Party Invitation (if you haven't already)
- 2 weeks** Order cake and decide on menu
- 1 week** Check on unanswered party invites
- 5 days** Deal with food (if applicable)
- 3 days** Double check on cake, party entertainment, and stay calm
- Week Of** Have celebration at school/daycare
- Party Day** Prepare snacks, bake/pick up cake, get \$ for tips for any help, HAVE FUN!

Appendix 2

Party Bill of Rights & Responsibilities

1. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO “NOT INVITE” MY CHILD TO YOUR PARTY

You have reasons for not inviting them (e.g. your child determined the guest list and my child didn't make it, you don't have the space or money to invite everyone, or we haven't had a play date or seen you socially for years, etc.). Although we can try to protect our kids from disappointment, it is part of life.

2. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE OFFENDED THAT YOUR CHILD WASN'T INVITED, BUT RESPECT THE DECISION AND DON'T PUSH IT

Please don't put the party planner in the difficult decision of inviting your child after the fact. There may be other people who were not invited (for reasons listed in #1) so respect that and don't try to get yourself invited.

3. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY NO TO A PARTY YOU ARE INVITED TO

Too many parties to attend? A weekend party and the only time you get to spend family time? You can say NO and not go to a party. This may mean your child doesn't get invited in the future, but alas, such is life.

4. YOU HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RSVP

Be respectful of the time and energy it takes to throw a party and call, text or e-mail an RSVP. In-person RSVPs are better than none, but if it is done around drop-off and pick up, brain cells are in short supply and people may not remember the RSVP.

5. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BRING A PRESENT EVEN WHEN IT SAYS “NO PRESENTS”

The party host can donate that present, but if you feel compelled to bring a present, you can do it.

DO IT YOURSELF FACE PAINTS FOR A PARTY

Face painting is almost always a hit with the 3-8 year old set. Hiring a face painter can be expensive, but they bring all the equipment and it's good stuff. You can also decide to try your own hand at making it happen. It's actually easier than you might think, as long as you buy good facepaints and good brushes. The professional paints can run you about \$65, but they can be used over and over for Halloween, rainy days, and for good ol quality time!

If you have time to buy online, go to sillyfarm.com
(You can also go to Abracadabra in the city by Union Square but much more expensive)

What you need to have it all

From Silly Farm (www.sillyfarm.com)

- Buy the Mehron basic and pastel pallet

- Buy some Detailz (white and black)

- Glitter (the holographic silver is great)

- A separate black and white paints

- Brushes (spend a bit of money here-- better brushes make all the difference)

- If you can splurge, get a few rainbow cakes-- lots of colors all together-- makes it really easy

Sponges-- you can get those at the dollar store-- no need to buy the expensive ones.

Here is the section we have that outlines different How Tos and Faces as examples

<http://parkslopeparents.phanfare.com/2258223>

Appendix 4

Park Parties PSP Blog – April 2011

There are many ways to celebrate a birthday in the park. Prospect Park offers lots of options. Check out this link http://www.prospectpark.org/parties_permits/birthdays. But if you want to keep it simple and your costs down, here are some ideas and tips for a “Do It Yourself Park Party”.

Picnic Spot

Find a picnic spot that has shade and trees. The trees are essential props for party games. In Prospect Park there is a nice spot right by the lake near the Audubon Center amongst the trees. It's a nice area that you could have to yourselves if you get there early enough on a weekend day. There are bathrooms in the Audubon Center and a great place to cool off. The Picnic House is a popular spot too with BBQs and tables.

People Power

Park parties need more adult bodies than home parties. So make sure if it's a drop off party you have a few parents that will stay to help supervise games and the children.

Timing

Park parties always last longer than home parties and usually there are a lot of late comers. This is probably due to the length of time to get to your spot. Don't stress out waiting for all the guests to arrive. Lay out the craft on a blanket and do some tattooing, provide water and snacks and if you feel brave get out the face painting crayons and do simple pink noses and whiskers.

Before any activities start, explain and demonstrate where the boundaries to the picnic area are. Walk around the boundaries so the children have a clear picture of how far they can go when playing and hunting and racing.

Craft

In true Cheeky Monkey Party style, start with a craft. This gets the kids engaged straight away and allows time for all the other children to arrive.

Load your Ikea Bags or shopping cart up with markers, stickers and stick-on jewels. Decorate a banjo, wand, fish or bag. You could provide paper so the kids can go bark rubbing or some coloring pages of animals and park stuff. Lay it all on a blanket and get the kids to jump in!

Face painting scares a lot of parents, but with face painting crayons (available in local toy stores) the children can actually decorate their hands or ask an older child to do pink noses and whiskers on everyone.

Games

Team games, races or classic party games all work well: I am sure you have a number of games that you did as a child that would be perfect for the park. Here are a few examples you can add to your list:

Throwing Bugs or Knock Down Tin Cans

A great warm up game. Tip your shopping cart onto its side and stack up some tin cans or place some plant pots on top. Line the children up behind a marker on the ground (a jump rope or stick) and throw bugs into pots or beanbags to knock down the cans. When they are done, send them to retrieve the bugs or re-stack the cans and get back in line. Little children of 3 & 4 usually want to play this game again and again.

Races

Wheelbarrow races, sack races, egg and spoon, balloon under and over. There are potentially hundreds of races you can do. All of which the children will love.

Smaller children like obstacle courses. If you have a tunnel and cones that is great but otherwise borrow outdoor items from friends or just use what you have. Line up the objects and demonstrate what the children have to do. You don't have to have a race, just keep them going through the course at a steady pace. At the PSP harvest fair a couple of years ago, I provided an obstacle course that consisted of a tunnel, hula hoops and cones. The children were asked to go through the course and collect a felt banana and bring it back to a basket. The children didn't want to do any of the other games I had planned, just that one, for about two hours! A PS Parent at a party I attended did a similar thing with the children's shoes. Bare feet and an obstacle course; what more could you want? *Do check the area for broken glass before you embark on this game.*

If you have time to make something, a car race is great fun. I made some out of Fresh Direct boxes. This is simple and easy to do.

Treasure Hunts

Every party needs a treasure hunt. I like to do a nature hunt for the older children, 6 and up. I put together a small booklet that has tasks for them to do. Find a leaf, draw a park animal, do a tree rubbing, look for treasure. For younger children, you can do this on a simpler level or you can just give them a picture guide of the things they need to find and hide them around the picture area. Or you can just hide lots of one thing and let them go for it!

Water Games

Not so easy to do in the park, unless you have access to lots of clean water or you find a water fountain and have a lot of patience. But here are a few ideas that don't need a huge amount of water but can help you cool off and have fun.

- Fill up balloons with water or water bombs and line the children up and get them to throw them back and forth until they are dropped and explode!
- Shoot down tin cans with water pistols. Or if you prefer, water bomb the tin cans.
- My dad every year would offer to be the "Sponge Man". He would run around an area and we would throw sponges at him. If you got a hit you got a sticker! This game only got funnier and easier each year as I sped up and he slowed down!
- Apple bobbing. You can do this without water. Tie the apples on long strings to a tree branch and set a timer for the children to try and each as much as they can. It's quite hard but hilarious.
- Over/Under Game. Have the kids stand in a single-file line. The person at the front of the line dips a sponge into a bucket of water to get it as wet as they can, and passes it over their head to the next person. That person tosses it under the legs, and so on. The goal is to keep as much water in the sponge as possible. The child at the back of the line squeezes the sponge out into a pitcher to see how much water they kept in the sponge.

Sticky Toffee Type Games

Basically, all the games the kids play in the school yard with friends, they love to play at their parties too.

- Sticky toffee. Tag but when you are caught you link hands and tag someone else together. Keep going until the whole group is part is linked.
- Steal the Fangs. A physical game where the children make human chains and have to steal fangs from each other. Four teams of five (or two teams of 10) are lined up and have to hold

each other's waists in a chain formation and not let go. The child at the front is the stealer and the one at the back has 5 fangs pegged (or 10 if just two teams) to him/her. The idea is when an adult shouts go, the teams trot around and try and steal fangs off each other. If the chain breaks, that team has to give away a fang to the nearest team. When the first team loses all their fangs the game stops. The winning team is the one with the most fangs. Team members can switch positions and you can start the game again once the fangs are pegged back on.

Slightly Calmer Games

If you want the children to calm down a little before cake time, then these games will slow the pace:

- Pass the Parcel or Hot Potato.
- Pass the cup. The children sit in a circle. Start the game by giving one of them a cup with small bits of paper in. Tell the children which direction to pass the cup. Tell them to speed up and slow down, hold over their heads and change direction, get up and turn around etc. Then shout STOP and whoever has the cup takes out one piece of paper and does what it asks. You can write tongue twisters, spells, poems, exercises and other tasks to put in the cup. When the task is complete, start the game again and carry on until everyone has had their turn.
- Tarantula's Web. The children stand around in a circle, one of them holding a ball of yarn in one hand and the end of the yarn in the other. They throw the ball of yarn to someone else in the circle but must keep hold of their end. The next person unravels the ball slightly, holds the yarn and throws the ball to someone else. The children carry on as long as they want making a massive cobweb. When they are done, spiders are thrown under the cobweb. An adult calls out a name and that child must carefully crawl under the cobweb, whilst still holding the yarn, and grab a spider. Carry on until everyone gets a prize. *Make sure to wrap up the yarn and put it away at the end of the game.*

Prizes

You don't have to have prizes, or you might just want a nice gift to give at the end in a goodie bag. You could have a badge that the children can peg on their clothes award them stickers after every game: they then can claim a prize at the end of the party. String up the goodie bags around a tree for prizes that are won at the end of the games. You will need to put names on the bags however.

Things the children can use to play in the park are probably the best prizes. Model airplanes, balls, insects, bug boxes, magnifying glasses and noisemakers. I have found that ribbon sticks are a great prize. They aren't expensive but loved by boys and girls alike.

If you want to make things, insect rocks are fun to do with your birthday child before the party.

Snacks

As the PSP link suggests (see below), don't worry about food too much. The children want snacky things like chips and crackers, as they are way too busy to sit down. Lots of water is the main thing and maybe a cupcake. Please try to use re-usable picnic ware if you can. I provide a general trash bag and a bag for the picnic ware that I can take home and wash up.

Check out the Park Slope Parents link regarding park parties, when you need a park permit, and other tips.

http://www.parkslopeparents.com/index.php?option=com_sobi2&sobi2Task=sobi2Details&catid=389&sobi2Id=60&Itemid=212

Joanna is Cheeky Monkey Party, a local Park Slope business dedicated to children's party games. She is happy to answer any of your party queries if you email her at info@cheekymonkeypary.com

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