

How to plan and execute a perfect birthday party

Written by Marcia Humphrey

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My five-year-old son, Landon, has been invited to a birthday party on Saturday. That's the same day that my oldest daughter, Alanna, turns into an official teenager-thrilling 13. Actually, Alanna is a leap year baby, having been born February 29th, 1996. So her actual birthday only comes every four years. We often get asked on which day we celebrate her birthday when it's not a leap year. Our solution is simple; we pick the nearest Saturday and celebrate! Often the celebration lasts for a few days, and our children really enjoy that. Whether attending a birthday party or hosting one, the costs can get quite pricey. So here are a few tips to help you keep those birthday celebrations under control.

Birthday Cards and Invitations

I am embarrassed to confess that, despite my lifetime of frugality, there was a short period of time when I actually bought birthday cards for small children. It was during those early years, when, as a first-time mom, I was still learning the ropes (never again!). I learned that you save big money when your children make cards for their friends. My daughter, Arianna just made me a beautiful Valentine Day card. It's amazing what some construction paper and glitter glue can do! Never underestimate the creativity of a young one. If you are throwing a party for your child (or yourself,) handmade invitations can be a fun alternative to store-bought ones. Finally, evite offers free online invitations for you to send to everyone on your guest list, www.evite.com. In addition, evite provides party planning ideas, and tools to help you stay organized and on budget.

Birthday Cakes

Rather than spending big bucks on a custom cake, consider making it yourself. If the party is in honor of your child, let him help with the baking. If you are looking for themed birthday cake ideas, check out books and magazines from the library or visit your local Michael's Craft Store for ideas, www.michaels.com. There you will find all the supplies to make any type of cake you can imagine. Michaels also has a free craft program just for kids. The next event, on March 14, happens to be about birthday party ideas. Call the Michael's nearest you to sign up.

Birthday Presents

Since birthdays are sure to come, it is always a good idea to have a few gifts on hand to give when you are invited to a party. Shopping in advance greatly reduces the stress of trying to get the perfect gift. Right now, Target among other retailers, still has clearance items available at

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75% off. Also, Instead of picking up an overpriced battery-operated toy, consider buying a floor puzzle (a good brain work-out), activity books or some craft supplies. My children love to showcase their artistic skills on the fridge. Homemade gifts from craft items are always fun and are sure to be remembered; beaded necklaces, bracelets, or personalized picture frames (with a picture included) are a few good ideas. These same low-cost homemade gift ideas also make fun party activities.

If skating, bowling, and Chuck E. Cheese parties are not in the birthday budget right now, no worries. There is plenty of fun to be had when you have a birthday party, in the comfort of your own home. Don't mistake an expensive and elaborate party for a better party. I recently drove past a sign on a business that says it all; "It's not what you have, it's what you Enjoy!"

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband Lonnie have three children.