

Party Planning Primer

We know you're already busy enough. And the work involved in pulling together a birthday party for your child can be overwhelming. However, if you start with a theme that excites your child – all of the pieces will fall into place. From princesses to painting, and tadpoles to tigers, our themed birthday guide will help you put together a fun and easy party for your child.



Theme: Wet 'N Wild.

Any time of the year can be a good time for a pool party. Whether you hold it in your own backyard, or rent a pool at your neighbourhood community centre, this is good clean fun. Ingrid Kasaks-Moyer has a word of caution "It's great to wait until your kids are older, say 8 or 9, because I have found that many parents are nervous about swimming parties. If you have a swimming party in your own backyard, hire a lifeguard for your own sanity and the kids' safety."

Food: Stay with the nautical theme and serve goldfish crackers, "seaweed" (green licorice), fish sticks or tuna sandwiches. Naturally the cake is shaped like a fish or decorated to resemble an underwater scene.

Activity: Swimming is the main activity; building octopuses out of marshmallows and toothpicks works well indoors. Award a prize for the best one.

Décor: Fish everywhere. Buy little nets at a pet store for scooping up the goldfish crackers, and yes, use a blue plastic table cloth to cover the tables. Sticking on plastic fish would be a great addition to create the ocean scene. Pet stores also sell aquarium plants very cheaply as well.

Loot bags: What else but a fish? Fighting fish are invincible. Dina Vardinoutis explains "I went to a pet store and they put them in little plastic containers for me. I also included a little sample size package of fish food. I

kept checking back and everyone's lasted almost two years!" The kids will be so excited they'll forgive you for not including any teeth-rotting candy.

Theme: Pots + Paints = Party!



Paint-your-own-pottery parlours are the perfect party place for pretty and patient petit Picassos.

Robynne Ostry held five year-old Paige's party at a local paintable ceramics studio and the girls got all fired up about the activity. *The Clay Room* offers Kids' Birthday Party packages in a private party room which can hold up to 25 children. Once the artists have finished with their creations, they are fired on site and gift-wrapped (you'll receive a call when they're ready for pick up). Parties are booked for two hours: one hour of painting and the other for your own pizza, present opening, or game playing events. The Clay Room is located at 297 Danforth Ave, 416-466-8474, www.theclayroom.ca

Food: Why not continue with the painting theme and have the children "paint" their own cupcakes or cookies. Buy some oversized (new) paintbrushes, mix up some sloppy icing and let them go. Bring lots of candies for decorating.

Activity: Painting, painting, painting.

Décor: If you can, bring along a big sheet or roll of blank paper and let the kids use markers, crayons, and paint, to create their own artistic surroundings. Construction paper, scissors and a stapler and they're making their own hats. Brown paper bags, markers and glue and they're making their own loot bags too.

Loot bags: Paint sets with brushes, small ceramic pieces to paint at home, or a small paint by number kit will have them reliving the fun all over again.





Theme: On The Green! Perfect for a bright summer's day, or indoors with a glow-in-the-dark option, miniature golf has never been more popular. Bring out the Tiger (Woods that is) in all your party guests and head over to **Funstation Funpark**. There are a variety of party packages to choose from, including food, and with two 18-hole "championship" courses, the mini-golfers will get hooked on the mini-golf. Kids 2 and under play for free. Party on! Funstation Funpark is located at 5 York Gate Blvd. North York, 416-736-4804, or visit www.funstationofunpark.com for more information.

Food: Go with the golf theme and serve up donut holes covered in white icing powder. Bring along some green frosted cupcakes (where everyone gets their own candle or flag to resemble a putting green). Hamburgers/hotdogs and chips are provided by Funstation. Clubhouse sandwiches optional (the parents will get that one.)

Activity: Fore! If you find a party room at your golf course, bring along some markers and paper and have the kids design their own golf hole – award a prize for the most creative.

Décor: Green tablecloth that you've glued water holes (blue paper), sand traps (yellow paper), and the golf hole (black paper) right on. Bring some cups and bubblegum balls and let them try to get a tabletop hole in one.

Loot bags: You can find mini-golf sets in all price ranges (from the dollar store to the 'good' toy store); either one club or a whole set for your newly minted Mike Weirs to carry on at home. Print out and tape on instructions to the nearest driving range or mini-golf location nearest your home.



Theme: M'Lord and M'Lady.

Their kingdom awaits them – and you sit back and wait for your kingdom to arrive as the amazing **Giggles & Grins** people transform your house into "Medieval Madness". They'll arrive ½ hour early to set up the scenery, birthday banners, flags... whatever it takes. Costumes for princesses, knights, dragons, or wizards are also brought to your door. And it gets better. Anita Sorrentino explains. "We bring all the drop cloths and paper towels for the crafts so that we never make a mess on our client's floor!" Who's being treated like royalty now?

Food: Giggles & Grins will provide a theme-related cake, complete with napkins, plates, cutlery, and even candles. If you need to provide a meal for the little royals, consider cutting sandwiches in the shape of crowns...and doesn't an upside down piece of pizza really look like a wizard's pointy hat?

Activity: During the two hour party, G&G will play games (Toad, Toad,

Prince), put on puppet shows and stories, and a theme-related craft. "We have done sparkly magic wands, jewelry boxes for the royal jewels, etc.," says Sorrentino.

Décor: Scenery to fit your chosen theme delivered to your door. Other popular settings include Pirate Pizzazz, Once Upon a Time..., Forest Fairies, and more.

Loot bags: A digital photo is taken of each child, and then inserted in a handcrafted fabric bag which contains a decorated picture frame just for them. For the birthday child it gets even better. "About two weeks after the party, the birthday child receives a beautiful scrapbook featuring all the pictures taken at the party. The book is addressed to the birthday child and arrives via courier." Located in Ajax, Giggles & Grins can be found at www.giggles-grins.com, or at 905-686-7783.



Theme: The Wheels on the Bus. For many children, the best part of

a field trip at school is the bus ride. Bring the adventure to your home with the Messy Hands Art Bus. Book Thomas (the Big Bus) for up to 22 guests, or Bessy or Bunty (up to 16 guests). The “messy hands” stay on the bus, parked outside your home for an hour, while your home stays clean, or at least doesn’t get any messier. Onboard, the kids will be creating a craft you choose – from Super Sculptures, Fabric Fun, Tie Dye, Wooden Wonders, or Furry Friends you’ll find something for your child’s age and interests. Messy Hands Art Bus, 9350 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill, 905-787-9900, www.messyhands.com

Food: When the kids come back into your house you’ll have the school bus cake waiting (yellow icing, black licorice and a square cake is all it takes). Gingerbread boys and girls provide the passengers.

Activity: Paste a cardboard school bus on the wall (draw it yourself or pick one up from a teacher supply store), and have the kids draw themselves on pre-cut ‘children’ shaped paper. Put the blindfolds on and play “pin the kid on the bus”. They’ll love to see where they’re riding.

Décor: Set the table up with a yellow table cloth, black plates (for wheels), and as many school bus pictures and posters you can get your hands on.

Loot bags: Toy buses, and an arts & crafts related activity will keep the fun rolling along...



Theme: All Aboard!

Keep your birthday party on track and rolling along with a train-inspired theme. Thomas the Tank Engine is a hit with most young children, particularly the boys. So what could be better than seeing a model train in action, rolling through a miniature village, complete with street parades, tiny houses and people... even a firetruck and its crew fighting a real blaze. You’ll find all this at **Cullen**

Gardens & Miniature Village

(www.cullengardens.com, click on the Just For Kids section). With their party packages, you’ll get admission to the miniature village where the kids can chase around and spot the mini-trains zooming pass, plus you can admire the beautiful gardens, where you’ll find playgrounds and even a splash pad (in season). 905-686-1600, Ext 239. Located at 300 Taunton Road West, Whitby.

Food: Cullen will provide the food for your party, but you might want to bring along some extra treats – like licorice sticks for train track making. Cut up a square slab cake into rectangular shapes, and let them ice and design their own miniature engines with candies. Licorice All Sorts make great wheels. Chew chew indeed!

Activity: Roll out a big sheet of white paper (available at most craft stores), pull out the markers or crayons, and let them fill in the railway cars you’ve already sketched out. Remember to bring this work of art home to hang in your child’s bedroom as a great reminder of their fast-trackin’ day.

Décor: Thomas the Tank Engine accessories are available almost everywhere, and if you have the time, create a “ticket booth” out of bristol board to hang on the wall, where kids can pick up their loot bags on the way out (or in if they’re really anxious!)

Loot bags: Bandanas can be found at most dollar stores – voila instant engineer. Mini trains and tracks are usually available to allow the good times to keep on chugging along. A “chewy” candy might be appropriate...

Theme: Whose Clues? Children between the ages of three and six love Blue’s Clues and Dora the Explorer. Bring the mystery home by turning your party guests into miniature sleuths. Hide treasures around your house (can be marked with a big picture of a birthday cake of the birthday child), and create easy-to-read, short notes, to direct the children from room to room. For

Party On!

those who can't read, coloured foot-prints can do the trick. Once they have all of the clues, they can piece together the puzzle. For example, finding a Mama Bear, a Papa Bear, a Baby Bear, a bowl of porridge and a blonde-haired little girl might get them thinking about the mystery nursery rhyme solution. Award one clue to each child as part of their loot bag.

Food: Use paper to cover up juice boxes and get the kids to guess what kind they're going to get (you can always exchange after), and let them decide what kind of pizza might be in each individual box. Make sure the birthday cake doesn't have the actual age of the child on it, rather the correct number of candles, or other objects to let the guessing continue.

Activity: Solving the mystery and winning the clues are the main activity, but you can also have the kids participate in simple memory games (removing an object and having them guess what's missing), or nursery rhyme themed charades (where talking is allowed!)

Loot Bags: This is one party where the loot bags come first – they contain everything a detective needs to solve the crime. Note pads, pens, magnifying glasses (even crazy glasses for disguise) can all be found at the dollar store. Put names on them so they don't get mixed up during the fun – or that could be a riddle you'll never solve. Add some gold coins (chocolate inside) as they're leaving; a reward for a job well done.

No matter what your child is interested in, your budget, or your timing, with a little thought you're bound to come up with a unique way to celebrate this truly once in a lifetime (hey they only turn five/six/seven once!).

P.S. Don't forget the camera!

Kathy Buckworth has "theme there, done that" with her four children, aged 3-13. Look for her book "The Secret Life of Supermom", now available at your favourite bookstore.



The Today's Parent Toronto Directory has an array of fun and reasonable activities to enjoy outside your home (and spare the carpet!). Check out www.todayparenttoronto.ca for:

- Indoor playgrounds
- Teen Spa Salons
- Waterslide parties
- Movie parties
- Laser Tag
- Tea Parties
- Roller Skating
- Cooking classes
- Jumping Castles
- Magicians
- Medieval Fun

Princess Palace
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