

BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers

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Home Economist**



Children's Parties- A Piece of Cake!

One of the wonderful things about having children is that you can relive childhood again. It is the chance to share laughter, wonder, joy and fun of childhood all over again with your child. These thoughts as well as the reflections of one year ago were on this mother's sentimental mind as we celebrated the occasion of Elise's first birthday.

Before the big event, I did do a little researching. After all, this was our first birthday party to plan

for! I discovered that for children, most of the year revolves around the occasion of their birthday." or "My birthday is near Christmas." Birthdays are a celebration of the child's personal new year. Most importantly, a child's birthday is an opportunity for parents to share this special time together with their child.

The highlights of the year often revolve around celebrations from birthdays, holidays and all occasions in between. As adults, many of our fondest memories are festive gatherings with our friends.

No matter how much time or energy and money is invested in a celebration, planning is the key to success. Here are a few party fundamentals, especially for the preschool and primary age children.

* Let children help in planning and encourage them to act as hostess or host.

* Set a reasonable time limit. Except for the very young, two to two and one-half hours is an average.

* To eliminate post party blues, invite one special friend to stay all day.

* Extra supervision or help comes in handy. Parents, baby-sitters, older siblings or relatives are great. So that a sibling does not feel left out, allow them to invite one friend and have them join in the events or act as your assistants. By the age of four, it is best to limit the number of adults so that the party child is truly the center of attention.

* Assign a neighbor, relative or friend to be in charge of picture taking or the video camera.

You are the best judge of what is

appropriate for your child's age, but these suggestions may be helpful. Toddlers can be upset by too many unfamiliar faces. Three to four guests, are ideal and you should limit the party to two hours. Toddlers are too young for games but will enjoy toys and records. Preschoolers enjoy some simple planned activities. Games and craft projects as well as eating are also a highlight at this age. A rule of thumb for the appropriate number of guests is one guest for each year of age.

By the primary grades, children are ready for supervised games. If possible, burn off excess energy with outdoor games and have lots of planned activities to keep everyone busy.

We certainly blew some of the rules for Elise's party. We were excited to share this occasion with all of our family and a few close friends. But realistically, the first year party was largely for mom and dad and the photos and video tape for Elise's memory book.

Regardless of the food, games or decorations that you plan for your next celebration, relax and allow yourself to be caught up in a party spirit and become a child at heart. By doing so, you will share in the excitement of special celebrations that will make for a lifetime of happy memories. If time continues to pass this quickly, it will soon be time to plan for birthday #2!

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