



Happy Birthday!

Planning an Imaginative Soiree for Your Sweetie

Written by Tonya Ellis Select Photos by Marisa Hugonnett and Nneka Kimble

Today's parents can recall simple childhood birthday parties where Mom or Dad baked a cake, and friends and family members came over to sing and watch the birthday boy or girl blow out the candles. While simple can be nice, birthdays are a great time to switch things up and party with style, taking your children's birthday celebrations from black and white to extraordinary. Sugar Land party planners share why festivities have become more sophisticated and offer tips on how to make your child's next bash a memorable one.

Growing Festivities

The Internet and media outlets have opened up a new world of possibilities in party planning, says Cindy Casaly, president of Designer Events, an international event planning company based in Sugar Land. "In the past, mothers did what their neighbors did. Now it's limited only to your imagination, and your budget."

Parties with Personality

When planning a party, keep in mind your child's personality, advises Diana Fountain, owner of Gymboree Play and Music. "Are they shy? Do they like being the center of attention? There's nothing worse than doing a party and saying, 'It's Kelsey's birthday,' and Kelsey starts saying, 'Waaah!'" Fountain says.

Activities for All Ages

Parents should consider the child's age when organizing a birthday celebration. Popular themes abound for every age group.

Babies - Parties for babies and toddlers are mainly for the parents. "At 1 and 2, they don't have a clue it's their birthday," explains Fountain. A home party is best. Keep the guest list small – under 10 – and decorations simple to ensure your child isn't overwhelmed. Favorite characters like Winnie the Pooh and Barney make great themes.

Preschoolers - At parties for preschoolers, make sure all the children get involved. Favorite themes include petting zoos, trains, clowns, moon walks, free play at play centers like Chuck E. Cheese or Gymboree, and fantasy dress-up parties.

Elementary/Pre-teens - When throwing celebrations for elementary-age children and pre-teens, athletic activity in games is key. Look at your child's favorite hobby for clues. "Let's say she's a cheerleader," Casaly says. "We'll create cheers for the other girls to participate in." Boys in this age group like sports themed parties, rock climbing, or parties focused on cars or characters. Parties based on hobbies like cooking, dress-up, ceramics, bowling, and skating make fun themes, too.

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Consider your child's personality when planning birthday parties



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Make sure to include all children in birthday games

Teens- Teens find active themes appealing, too. “One of the favorites is inflatable sumo wrestling,” Casaly says. Another hot new theme for teens is the Michael Jackson party, she says. Everyone gets one sequined glove and white socks, Michael Jackson music is played, and guests learn the moonwalk. Other fun themes for teens include scavenger hunts, karaoke, laser tag, movie and pizza, sleepovers, and pool parties.

Imaginative Venues

Great hosts know when throwing a bash, location is key. Creative venues can add to the excitement of your child’s birthday theme, captivating guests. Carrie Gould, marketing manager at Sugar Land Ice and Sports Center, is no stranger to that concept. The mom of three has hosted theme parties at various locations over the years for her children, Eli, 9, Lillie, 6, and Jeb, 4. “When my oldest turned 5, I had a party at Bounce U and I hired Spider Man to come play with the kids,” she says. Gould’s children have also celebrated with a rock climbing party at Lifetime Fitness, a hockey party at the Houston Aeros arena, and a party at the Houston Zoo. Rather than accepting presents, Gould requests guests donate money for charity, often adding a fun tie-in to the party’s theme. “We adopted a pink flamingo at the zoo, and at the Aeros game, we gave \$1,300 to their charity,” she says.

Along with taking themes to new heights, venues also save parents clean-up duty afterward. “When you start factoring in all the time, and cost, and mess, and everything, you’re going to end up spending just as much time, and energy, and money,” Fountain says. “You have to clean up before they come over, and you have to clean up after. Once you start doing the math, you realize it’s easier to do it somewhere else.”

Celebrate Good Times

No matter what theme you choose for your child’s party, don’t forget to document it with pictures and video. It’s helpful to assign someone else the role of photographer, so you can focus on your birthday star and helping with the flow of the party. Though the party venues and themes may have changed from when parents were kids, the idea behind having them is still the same: celebrating life. “You’re doing something that is for that child,” Fountain says. “You know you are celebrating your child.” If you have a memorable birthday party story you’d like to share, email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com. **SLM**

TONYA ELLIS is a freelance writer, wife, and mother. She enjoys planning parties for her three children.

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Justin's friends help him celebrate his fifth birthday



Sydney has a blast at her dress-up birthday party



For a birthday with style, let your sweetie help pick out the theme



Birthday venues like Castle Jump often offer imaginative decorations



Princess parties are always popular with Sugar Land girls



Choose a cake that matches your child's theme



Kyra celebrates her third birthday with Snow White at the Magic Kingdom in Orlando

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