

RULES: Ask about allergies on the invitation. Label ALL food. Keep cake hidden until the moment. 1:4 adult:child ratio. Every game needs prizes for ALL participants. Label favor bags by name. 2-hr party max for ages 4-7.

■ 4-6 Weeks Before

- Ask birthday child — theme, friends, special wishes
Even toddlers have opinions. Involve them early.
- Set the date — Saturday 1-4 PM is the sweet spot
- Set budget — venue, food, cake, decor, favors, activities
- Choose venue — home, park, art studio, trampoline park
Venue parties cost more but include activities + cleanup
- Book venue if using — popular spots fill 4-6 wks out
- Draft guest list — guideline: invite child's age in guests
- Send invitations 3-4 weeks out — include allergy note
Include: time, location, RSVP, theme, allergy request
- Order birthday cake — 2-3 weeks minimum lead time
- Book entertainment — performers book up fast
- Plan activities — 3-4 for 2-hr party for young kids
Kids don't self-entertain at parties without guidance

■ 2-3 Weeks Before

- Track RSVPs — note every food allergy mentioned
- Order or buy all decorations
- Plan full menu — use calculator for quantities
- Buy and assemble favor bags — \$3-6 per child
Label each bag by name — prevents arguments
- Prepare activity materials and game supplies
- Plan the party schedule and post it for parents
Kids manage transitions better with a clear schedule
- Create playlist — age-appropriate background music
- Plan an indoor backup if party is outdoors
- Arrange helpers — 1 adult per 4-5 children
Toddlers: 1:3. Ages 4-7: 1:4. Ages 8-12: 1:6
- Plan gift-opening moment and assign gift recorder

■ 1 Week Before

- Finalize guest count — send reminders
- Buy all non-perishable food
- Buy themed tableware
- Confirm cake order with bakery
- Label favor bags by child's name
Named bags prevent the pile-grab at party end
- Make homemade decorations if any
- Prepare allergy-safe foods separately
Separate containers, separate utensils — no cross-contact
- Buy candles — 1 per year + 2 extras + lighter
- Test all games and confirm activity materials
- Confirm helpers, entertainers, and venue access

■ Day Before

- Set up party space if possible
Use foil balloons — helium deflates overnight
- Prepare make-ahead food
- Chill all juice boxes and beverages overnight
- Set up activity stations
- Plan food table layout
- Set up gift table with bag for cards
- Confirm cake pickup time and logistics
- Charge all devices — speaker, camera
- Brief birthday child on the party schedule
- Put birthday child to bed at a reasonable time

■ Party Day

- Begin setup 60-90 minutes before guests arrive
- Inflate balloons and finish decorating
- Set tableware at each place setting
- Set out snacks and drinks — NOT the cake yet
Keep cake hidden until the candle moment
- Pick up cake — level, in AC, non-slip mat
Buttercream melts around 85°F
- Greet families — direct kids to activity area
- Start with arrival activity while others trickle in
Coloring sheet on each chair welcomes early arrivals
- Run structured activities per the plan
- Serve food with a 5-minute transition warning
- Cake moment — sing, blow, cut, serve promptly
Children who've waited 90 min for cake are at peak impatience
- Hand favor bags directly at the door as guests leave
Direct handoff prevents pile-grab chaos
- End on time — parents with young kids appreciate it

■ Food Safety & Allergy

- Ask about allergies on invitation — not as afterthought
Include: 'Please mention food allergies when you RSVP'
- Know the 9 major allergens: peanuts, tree nuts, dairy...
FDA: peanuts and tree nuts are most common in children
- Separate labeled containers + dedicated utensils for allergy food
Cross-contamination is a real risk
- Label every food item — including homemade
Labels let parents decide safely without asking you
- Ask parents of severely allergic kids about their preference
Some prefer to bring their child's own food
- Cold foods on ice — hot foods above 140°F
- Discard food after 2 hours at room temp (1 hr at 90°F+)
USDA: children more vulnerable to foodborne illness
- Supervise toddlers — choking hazards at food tables
Under 4: cut grapes, cherry tomatoes, hot dogs into pieces
- First aid kit accessible — bandages for scraped knees
- Know emergency contacts for all child guests

■ Activities by Age

- Toddlers: sensory play, bubbles, free dancing
Keep it 1-1.5 hrs. Some will nap, cry, or refuse. Normal.
- Ages 4-7: Musical Chairs, treasure hunt, ring toss
Reward ALL participants immediately — not just winners
- Ages 8-12: relay races, trivia, scavenger hunt
- Teens: photo booth, DIY food station, trivia
- Piñata: pull-string type; candy bag per child ready first
- Pass the Parcel: small treat in every layer
- Every game: prizes for ALL participants
Children who don't win have big feelings. Plan for it.
- 1 backup activity ready — something always runs short

■ PRO KIDS PARTY TIPS

- Ask about food allergies on the invitation — not after the menu is planned. Children's allergies can be life-threatening.
- Label every food item and keep allergy-safe alternatives in separate containers with separate utensils.
- Keep the birthday cake out of sight until the candle moment — anticipation management is real.
- Every game must have prizes for ALL participants — children who don't win can derail party energy quickly.
- Hand favor bags directly to each child at the door — prevents the pile-grab and gives you a farewell moment.

More party planning guides at spoonandsip.com

Adult Birthday Checklist • Baby Shower Checklist • Party Drink Calculator • Party Punch Calculator