



Making children's birthdays special

Children's birthday parties seem to be getting bigger every year. But bigger is not always better when it comes to celebrating children's birthdays

There's no doubt a child's birthday is a special day. It's one day of the year when they legitimately become the centre of attention for their family and friends.

It's not just children for whom birthdays have significance. A child's birthday is also a milestone for mums and dads. Another year older means another year along the parenting journey and plenty of fond memories too.

Traditionally a child's birthday has been recognised with gifts, a family gathering, and perhaps a special treat with a few friends. Essentially it's been a relatively low-key family affair with parties to celebrate milestones such as fifth, tenth and thirteenth birthdays.

Over the last decade children's birthday parties have become an annual celebration; and they've become increasingly bigger events.

Where once a few good friends would gather; we are now seeing the emergence of the BIG party where everyone, or close to everyone, in a child's class gets an invitation whether they are close friends or not. **This Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** is interesting to say the least.

It's obviously beneficial for the 'birthday child' as the number of presents they receive increases astronomically. Somehow there is something not quite right about a child receiving twenty or more presents, not to mention the gifts from his or her family.

Having the whole gang along removes the special opportunity for celebrating a birthday with their closest friends.

I know many parents organise whole class parties to encourage friendships. However in wanting to promote friendships they may inadvertently be making it more difficult for kids to form





friendships as little differentiation is given between a good friend and a child in their wider social circle when invitations are issued en masse. Good friends need to be recognised as such.

Some parents invite the whole class so that no child is left out or feels disappointed. That's a great intention, but it removes the chance for parents to teach the 'birthday child' to be discreet when issuing invitations and to be mindful of the feelings of those that aren't invited. It also removes the difficult decision-making process of choosing whom to invite from a child, which can be a great learning experience in itself.

The **Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** places enormous pressure on parents to come up with something bigger and better every year. Backing up a BIG PARTY year after year is hard work.

If you are over the **Big Birthday Party Phenomenon** here are a few ideas to make celebrating your child's birthday special, keep the budget and your sanity in tact and incorporate your child's friends as well:

1. **Alternate** birthday parties with gatherings or sleepovers of a few friends (without presents) every two or three years.
2. If you have a party each year then consider **matching** the number invited with their age. That is, six year olds can have six friends and so on.
3. **Identify** the different groups your child is in and allow him or her to invite a small number from each group. So school friends mix with friends from outside school.
4. **Involve** children in choosing and preparing the activities, food and treats for their party.
5. If organising a BIG BIRTHDAY BASH is for you, then keep it for your child's **milestones** such as their tenth birthday.

Birthdays like a lot of things can get out of hand. It's probably better to aim for SPECIAL rather than BIG and that means surrounding your child by his family and **close** friends to celebrate his or her special day of the year.

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