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Birthday Party Do's and Don'ts:

A Parent's Refresher on Party Etiquette

Parties are the spice of life – a time to gather with friends, laugh, talk, play games and enjoy one another's company. Still, there are some rules of etiquette when it comes to hosting or attending a party that you need to be aware of. Here are some tips for handling common party concerns to make sure you and your child are invited back!

How do I handle guests who haven't RSVP'd?

While most guests understand the importance of RSVP'ing, some just aren't timely with their replies. As the party grows closer, feel free to call those who haven't responded and ask if they plan to come. You can start the call by saying, "I just wanted to make sure you got the invitation," which often softens the tone of the conversation and elicits a non-defensive reply.

How much should I spend on the gift?

The idea behind the gift is to show your friend that you care. Consider your budget, then try to find something fitting within range. A gift that shows creativity makes it even more special than simply buying something expensive.

Are thank you notes still expected?

In this day of digital correspondence, many people send thank you e-mails rather than cards. That's why sending a hand-written, personalized card via snail mail is so appreciated today. It shows that you took the time to let the host or guest know you really enjoyed the gift or the party. And it's a great habit to get your children to adapt.

Do I have to invite all of my child's friends to the birthday party?

No, that could lead to chaos! But be careful when sending invitations so there aren't hurt feelings among those who aren't included. It's best to keep the number of guests to a minimum to maintain control over the party. For preschoolers, try two to five guests, for school age children, try five to 10 guests, and for older kids, try to keep the number under a dozen.

How can I help my child be a good party guest or host?

Children sometimes don't understand party protocol so it's good to rehearse ahead of time. If the party is for a friend, remind your child that it's a special day for that friend, and soon he or she will have a special day. Review all the fun things that will be happening at the party, such as games, prizes, cake, ice cream and entertainers, and how to behave in each case. If your child is the host, ask him or her to remember that guests are there to celebrate, and to be thankful and appreciative they came.

How do I handle the games so that no one feels bad about losing?

Non-competitive games, like treasure hunts and talent shows are always best at kid's parties. That way no one loses and everybody wins. But if you do play competitive games, like "Musical Chairs" or "Pin the Tail on the Donkey," give each player a prize for participating. There's no rule that says you can only have one winner!

What do I do if there's an unhappy – or unruly -- party guest?

Sometimes one of the guests is overwhelmed by all the activity and needs special attention. If you find a child who is upset or unwilling to participate, have him or her help you with the party details, such as time the games or pass out balloons, so the child has something to keep him or her occupied. On the other hand, if you have a guest who is misbehaving and causing a disruption, feel free to take the child aside and let him or her know he or she needs to cooperate or you'll have to call his or her parents. This gives the child a chance to calm down and rejoin the group without feeling embarrassed.

How do I handle opening gifts at a children's party?

The gift dilemma offers two schools of thought. Some recommend you don't open the gifts at the party because the other children will want to play with the presents and the birthday child may not want to share his or her new toys. Others say that the children learn the party is not about them, and that they do enjoy watching the birthday child open up their gift. Think about your child and what works best for him or her, then act accordingly.