



Peter Gardini

Professional Magical Entertainer

www.astonmagic.co.uk

(01923) 663849

CRB certified for working with children and young people

Member of The Magic Circle and British Actors' Equity

Member of The Fellowship of Christian Magicians

Ideas and hints for planning and running a children's party

Children's parties can be great fun for parents and children alike, but they can very easily turn into nightmares for overworked mums. These hints and tips may help to organise your party.

Try to restrict the party to those children who are within a year or two of the birthday child's age. Seven year old Simon may play with his three year old sister at home, but neither he or his friends will play with younger children at a party.

If other parents attend the party, ask them to sit and watch with the children and join in. Children enjoy the show much more when Mum and Dad are taking part as well.

How many excited children you can really manage in the space you have? Ask other adults to help if necessary. An extra pair of hands is useful when serving food and refilling drinks.

Parents put in a lot of hard work at parties, but much of this is wasted if the food that been prepared is not eaten. The trick is to keep the food simple and not have too many choices. Children will often ignore the expensive and carefully made food and sandwiches, but they will devour such things as sausages, crisps, hula hoops, chips, burgers, pizza, ice cream, jellies and cakes. Children filled with fizzy drinks often erupt later leaving you a nasty mess to clear up. Some children also become hyperactive after consuming certain foods, so be prepared.

If you are going to hire a children's entertainer, check that they are a member of a recognised society such as Equity or The Magic Circle. These organisations have a strict entrance examination which should ensure that you will be getting a competent performer.

Check that the entertainer is covered by public liability insurance and is fully CRB checked for working with children and young people. This is important! It is essential that another adult is in the room at all times in case of accident or illness. Book the entertainer well in advance of your party to ensure that they are not already booked elsewhere.

2 1/2 hours is more than ample for a really good party for four to ten year olds. This gives time for games, food and entertainment within the children's attention span.

If you are going to hire a bouncy castle or ball pit, ensure that you are covered by insurance.

Most restaurants and burger bars do not employ professional entertainers, they simply use members of staff to keep the children amused. However, they will often allow you to hire in your own entertainer.

Fancy dress is great for older children, but please advise the parents on safety, (crepe and tissue paper burn nicely, also metal swords and fairy wands can be dangerous in confined spaces). If in doubt, get advice from a local costume hire shop.

If you want a good party, plan it, keep it simple, keep it short. Restrict the age range and the numbers, don't do it all on your own. If you want peace of mind and you feel you can afford it, book a good professional children's entertainer. This will keep them amused and out of your hair while you prepare the food and refreshments.

REMEMBER, YOU JUST CAN'T BEAT LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

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