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The Party-Planning Survival Guide For Parents

by Mike Clarke
The Kids Magician



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Children's entertainer Mike Clarke (a.k.a. **"Magic Mike"**) provides FUNtastic magic entertainment across the UK for children and families.

The information in this guide is for parents planning their child's birthday party.

Mike hopes that the information is of use to you - and that it helps you survive (and even ENJOY!!) your child's next birthday party!



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Step 1 - The Party Date

Do you want to have the birthday party on your child's actual birthday itself?

Some years, your child's birthday will be on a Saturday or Sunday, which are historically the most popular days to hold a party. Weekends tend to be easier for parents.

Some people prefer to have weekday parties, either during the day (pre-school) or after school if their children are a bit older.

There is no right or wrong decision here - only what YOU would prefer.

Logistically it may well be easier to hold the party on a weekend - you are more likely to have the time to prepare things for the party, and other parents are more likely to be available to help you if needed.

The best thing to do is come up with a few date options - i.e. either Saturday 2nd or Sunday 3rd OR the weekend after, Saturday 9th or Sunday 10th.

If you are semi-flexible with the date, it will make it slightly easier for you to decide on a party venue (see next page).



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Step 2 - The Venue

There are really 2 options here - either you hold the party at your home, or you hire another location to use. There are pros and cons to each option.

If you decide to have the party at home, it can be easier to have a more intimate party, where only close friends are invited. It means that you don't have to transport any food and decorations to another venue, and it makes it easier to decorate for the party in advance.

Disadvantages are the mess that you may well have to tidy up after everyone goes, and the space limitations that your house will have compared to a church hall.

Advantages of an external venue (i.e. church/village hall, play centre, sports centre etc.) include additional space - ideal for playing games in - less risk of things getting broken and potentially easier parking for guests (depending on the parking near your house of course!)

Disadvantages of an external venue include the hassle of moving food etc. to the venue, decorating the venue in time as well as the actual quality of the venue itself.

In his 10+ years of entertaining children, Mike has been in most village and church halls in Bristol and the surrounding areas. Some venues have been absolutely fantastic - modern, well kept, warm, bright, well-equipped etc. Other venues have not been as well maintained, with bad lighting and heating.

Mike recommends that before you use an external venue, if you haven't already seen it, you check it out!

The last thing you want to experience is something one of Mike's clients had - turning up to a venue to discover it was in the middle of being renovated, with paint and bits of wood everywhere! It wasn't the easiest venue to safely entertain 30 four and five-year old children!

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Step 3 - Timing The Party

Once you have decided upon a venue, you need to decide the time you will have the party.

In the UK, most parties in Mike's experience tend to be 2-hours in length. That is a good length of time, certainly for children aged 3-7. It's long enough for the kids to have fun, but short enough that they don't get totally "over-the-top" excited. It also means that you won't be completely exhausted either!

Some people prefer to run a party late morning, 11am-1pm (which means you'll need to provide lunch for the children), while others prefer to have it in the afternoon, either 2-4pm or 3-5pm (which means you'll need to provide an afternoon tea for them.)

A morning party does mean an earlier start for you if you want to be organised, while an afternoon party provides you with more time to get ready.

Step 4 - Theming The Party

Now that you have organised the time, location and venue of the party, you want to decide whether to theme the party, and if so, what theme to go with.

You may prefer to not have any particular theme. This will enable you to save money on party decorations, party plates and cups etc., as you will not be buying character-themed items.

However, you may decide to choose a specific theme. This theme will depend on your child's interests, hobbies and favourite characters.

Popular themes can include a Princess Party, Cowboys Party, High School Musical Party, Star Wars Party or a Superhero Party

If your child has a favourite cartoon, you can easily have a party themed to that. So yes, you could easily find yourself organising a Lazytown-themed party, and getting dressed up as Sportacus! :-)

Bear in mind that buying themed party decorations can be more expensive than regular (standard) decorations.

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Step 5 - Party Guests

Now you're well on the way to organising your child's party, but we're missing something important. What could that be? Oh yes....guests!

You now have the fun job of deciding how BIG (or how small) a party you are comfortable arranging.

The tendency nowadays seems to be to invite the whole class if your child is at school. The majority of parties I perform at currently have between 20-30 children.

That can be a really good thing, as the children all know each other well, you'll know most, if not all, of the parents and with 25-30 kids you can get a really fun, exciting atmosphere during the party (and of course, your child ends up with more birthday presents!!)

However, if you do invite "everyone", you find yourself automatically planning and preparing a much larger party. That means more food, more party bags...and more noise during the party!

Should a larger party not be your ideal thing, please be assured that there is absolutely nothing wrong at all with deciding to have a smaller scale party - maybe 10-15 close friends.

A smaller party will be easier and cheaper to organise, and it gives you more opportunity to hold the party at your home.

Personally, Mike thinks that both options can work really well, and both large and smaller parties can be GREAT fun for the children.

It is, once again, a personal choice for you to make.

TOP TIP:

As an additional idea, more parents nowadays are arranging joint parties with another family whose child has a birthday around the same time. Partnering up with some friends in that way can save money, time and effort, as you can equally share the workload!

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Step 6 - Party Decorations

It can be very easy to decorate a party venue, whether at home or a village hall.

The easiest way to decorate the venue is to use lots of balloons. These are cheap to buy and make a real difference to any venue.

It is also always a good idea to put some balloons outside the party venue in a highly visible place, to help people know where the party is!

If you do decide to decorate with balloons, you are better off tying the balloons together in bunches and hanging them on the walls, to give out to the children at the end of the party. If balloons are left on the ground at the very beginning of the party, the children tend to go a bit mad with them and it can be extremely hard to calm them down again...

...even for an [amazing children's entertainer!](#)

You might also want to consider printing some 'old' pictures of the birthday child/children and fastening them to the doors/walls with blu-tack. It's always funny for their friends to see what they were like when they were younger.

Another nice idea is to have a BIG birthday card, that the guests can all write in as they arrive at the party. Think of it as a kid-sized guest book!



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Party Planning Checklist

Below is checklist for to to ensure that everything is going to run smoothly and your child is going to have the greatest party of their life!

BEFORE THE PARTY

- Theme decided upon
- Party location decided
- Party location booked
- Food menu decided upon
- Food and drinks purchased
- Birthday cake purchased/made
- Games List decided
- Games equipment prepared
- Invitations sent out
- Entertainer booked

Entertainers checked for:

- Testimonials/Recommendations
- Show Package options
- Prices
- Information Pack
- Giveaways and handouts
- Availability!

THE DAY OF THE PARTY

- CD-player/stereo with fun music
- Name stickers prepared
- Balloons tied to door
- Pets shut away
- Duties assigned to everyone helping at the party
- Table set aside to receive presents
- Doors closed to 'out of bounds' rooms
- Meal for evening purchased/prepared
- Bottle of wine chilling in fridge!

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