

## **ABC Magazine Feature**

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### **Pass the Parcel to Someone Else**

*Planning the Perfect Party for Children*

Gone are the days when children are satisfied with Pass the Parcel and a few rounds of Musical Chairs. Unfortunately, as any parent who has recently hosted a birthday bash for their son or daughter will know; creating the perfect children's party can be a big headache.

Hordes of dissatisfied children, long faces and endless attempts at keeping them all occupied throughout the duration of the event can prove to be a thankless and exhausting task. So how do you make the perfect children's party? The answer it seems is in the planning.

A great starting point from which to plan a party can be if your son or daughter has a fascination with a particular character, colour, place or period in history. Topics such as; 'Fairies & Pixies' or 'Under the Sea' can help to inform your choices about everything from the décor to the deserts. Plus, the opportunity to come in fancy dress (including the adults!) means that everyone's having fun.

One of the biggest mistakes parents make is under estimating how tiring it can be trying to feed, entertain, and take care of a large group of excitable ten year-olds, which is why bringing in the professionals to help out is a great solution. Leave yourself the space to concentrate on serving the jelly and ice-cream, whilst someone else keeps the little ones smiling.

Events such as the Brighton & Hove May Festival have opened the eyes of children and parents alike, to the plethora of fantastical entertainers that are slowly replacing the more traditional clowns and magicians on the children's party circuit. Now young people can be wowed and amazed in their own back gardens. From readily available top-quality performers to companies organising events and parties, the resurgence in the popularity of Circus and Street entertainment is truly apparent.

Stilt-walkers, unicyclists, fire performers, jugglers, acrobats and aerialists are proving to be very attractive options for private events, and can bring instil a sense of wonder in people of all ages. Entertainment specialists can provide experienced and insured performers who have a proven track record of working with young people. With sufficient notice they can even arrange for their performers to appear in bespoke costumes chosen to match your theme.

If your children are not the type to simply watch without wanting to have a go themselves then why not let them? What could be more effective at keeping your young guests occupied than learning how to juggle, stilt-walk or perform magic tricks? Or, if your son or daughter loves to dance then why not bring in a professional dance teacher to give them their own personalised dance class? Whether it's Bollywood, ballet or break-dance this will certainly give them something to talk about at school the next day!

For those who love to get dressed up then you could have a Make-Up party where the young people get to revamp themselves into clowns, pirates, monsters, dolls or animals. The options are endless, but the key it seems is not trying to do everything yourself!

**Here are some Do's & Don'ts to get your children's party off to a swing:**

- Start planning early.
- Think about your children's passions and interests and how you can integrate this into a theme
- Set clearly on the invitation what's involved. Should people come in fancy dress? If they are doing an activity such as dance or circus skills then make sure they bring the appropriate clothing. Stilt walking in ra-ra skirts is pretty difficult!
- Speak to the professionals – asking for advice is free! They may have some ideas that you hadn't thought about. Give them a clear budget from the outset and see what they can offer.
- Be clear about what you want to make sure your expectations are met.
- All reputable agencies will provide entertainers and workshop leaders who have full Public Liability Cover, have been cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau with a proven track record of working with children and young people. Specialist companies will also recommend that their freelancers follow clear guidelines for the Protection of Children & Young People, as well as Health & Safety.
- If you are uncertain about any aspect of your party plans then call in an expert to meet with you in person, preferably at the venue. They will be able to see if your requests are manageable and can carry out a written Risk Assessment. Forging out for this small fee up front, can save time, energy and unnecessary expense later on.

Remember if you have the money but not the time, ask the professionals to help with every aspect from initial planning to event management on the day. For those with limited funds then it might be wise to consider a workshop rather than a performance. Workshop leaders will include small demonstrations as part of the workshop, and will provide all the necessary equipment. Although you may have less choice in respect of costumes and skills, your special guests will be entertained and educated at the same time!

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