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Georgia Aquarium is a nonprofit committed to inspiring awareness and preservation of our ocean and aquatic animals worldwide.
A MODERN MOM’S GUIDE TO BIRTHDAY PARTIES

by Sara Kendall

Birthday parties today can be simple, at-home affairs or more elaborate themed celebrations at a special venue. Modern moms can create the party they – and their child – want, but all choices have pros and cons. Here’s what to consider when choosing what’s best for your family and budget.

- **PAPER INVITES OR EVITE**
  Paper invitations are classic and memorable, while evites are all the rage in our technology-fueled world. Paper invitations add a personal touch to an upcoming event, make an excellent keepsake item, but are not low-cost.
  Evites and other digital invitations are gaining in popularity and most are free to send by simply signing up – all you need is the recipients’ email addresses.

- **HOME PARTY OR PARTY VENUE**
  By hosting your child’s birthday party in your home, you have complete control – no guest count limits, time or date restrictions. Hosting at home may be less expensive, but it involves more work for you. Food, decorations, activities and entertainment will fall on your to-do-list, and don’t forget about the tons of cleaning, before and after the party.
  Choosing a party venue usually takes only a telephone call or two to take care of most of the work, but can come with a price tag.
  “I am a huge fan of holding birthday parties at a venue versus my home. One of the biggest factors for me is I feel it allows me to really experience the party with my kids and be in the moment with them versus worrying about all the details,” says Amy Hornor, mom of two. “Having a party coordinator with you takes the pressure off you trying to be Mom and a party hostess.”

- **CHARITABLE GIVING**
  One trend is opting for a party that benefits a charity, and decorating along that theme. Some families collect food for a food pantry, toy donations for children’s hospital, or pet food for an animal rescue organization or shelter. Older children might invite their friends to a service day to benefit a charitable organization.

- **TRADITIONAL CAKES, CAKE POPS OR DOUGHNUT CAKES**
  Serving a traditional cake is a statement piece especially when made to convey the birthday theme, but it can also be expensive. Some parents spend less on the decorations and put more money into a large cake, which becomes the centerpiece of the party.
  “I am a huge fan of holding birthday parties at a venue verses my home. One of the biggest factors for me is I feel it allows me to really experience the party with my kids and be in the moment with them versus worrying about all the details,” says Amy Hornor, mom of two. “Having a party coordinator with you takes the pressure off you trying to be Mom and a party hostess.”

- **NO GIFTS, PLEASE**
  Some parents may choose a “no gifts” party because their child already has many toys and space in their home is limited. Sometimes that choice is in consideration for other parents – those $10 or $20 gifts start to add up when kids go to multiple parties in a year.

- **TO OPEN GIFTS OR NOT**
  Some parents feel it would be more polite to open gifts. Others think it puts more emphasis on the gifts rather than the focus on the party. The advantage of opening presents teaches children to be gracious, but opening them after the party takes the pressure off children who are unable to express proper gratitude or hide disappointment.

- **THANK YOU NOTES**
  Many parents are firm believers in thank you notes, to teach kids to be gracious and polite and even to hone writing skills. Other parents may feel a note attached to a goodie bag, thanking kids for coming to the party, or a personal thank you from the child as guests leave the party, is sufficient.
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- **Mini-pizza party:** Give each guest a pre-baked crust; set out sauce and toppings in bowls and let them get creative! Before baking, place them on parchment-lined cookie sheets and use a pencil to write a name by each pizza.

- **Fruity cones:** Dip the top of an ice cream cone in melted chocolate, add sprinkles and chill until set. Fill the cone with fresh fruit.

- **Ice cream bowls:** Press pre-made cookie dough into muffin tins, bake and cool; serve filled with ice cream and toppings. ahelicoptermom.com

- **Chocolate frogs:** Coat 2 mini pretzels and a chocolate sandwich cookie in green candy bark. Press the cookie on top of the pretzels; add candy eyes and a tongue cut from a red fruit rollup. Chill until set. bakingandboys.com

- **Ice cream:** Pre-scoop and freeze ice cream to make cake-serving time easier.

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Linda's Riding School
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The Little Gym
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