

Birthday Party with Heart

September 15, 2009



One of our most cherished cultural traditions is to celebrate the date of a loved one's birth with a party. For our kids, this tradition often begins when they are as young as 1 or 2. As parents, we want to see our kids honored in a way that is memorable and fun. Birthday parties are best known for fun themes; games; a cake with candles, a song, and a wish; and special playtime with classmates, close friends, and siblings.



And then there are the gifts. Typically, each party guest brings a gift for the birthday child, and often each leaves with a thank-you gift. The number of gifts trading hands in all the kids' birthday parties across the country on any given weekend, let alone if we count the entire year, adds up to a number in the millions.

There's an opportunity here, while kids are excitedly reveling in an abundance of fun, goodies, and new stuff, to appreciate how fortunate they are and to share a little with those who aren't so fortunate.

When To Do It

The next birthday party you host for one of your children.

What To Do

As you plan your kid's birthday party, consider having guests bring a donation, to encourage kids to make part of the party experience an opportunity to share with others.

What to Donate: Cash or a Book

1. Explain to your "birthday kid" that you'd like to include in the party a fun way to give something to those who have less.
2. Decide whether you prefer that the donation be books or cash.
3. If you choose a book donation:
 - Let your kid know you would like to ask all the party guests to bring a book to donate.
 - Pull out a number of your kids' books. Talk about the books they have and about kids who may not have any books.
 - Help your kid identify one book to give away at the party.
 - Help your kid choose which organization should get the books. If necessary, you can suggest a doctor's office, the hospital, an after-school program, or some other appropriate organization in your community.
4. If you choose a cash donation:
 - Talk to your kid about the idea of sharing part of their birthday abundance with kids who may not have very much.
 - Let your kid know you would like to ask all the birthday party guests to bring a small cash donation — \$1 to \$5 — and that your kid gets to decide which organization will receive the money.
 - Explain that your kid will still be receiving gifts, but they may be a little less lavish, because the guests will also be giving to the charity your kid chooses.
 - Help your kid choose which organization should get the donation. You can suggest an animal shelter, children's hospital, a food bank, or some other recognizable organization in your community.
5. Have your kid decorate the donation box (for books) or jar (for cash), including putting the name of the organization on it.
6. In your party invitations, include a request for each guest to bring a book (new or used) or a small cash donation, which will go to the "xxx" charity your child has selected.
7. Place the donation box or jar near the entry to the party so guests can easily deposit their donations as they arrive.
8. Before the party ends, have your kid thank guests and share where the donation will be going.
9. Pick a day to deliver the donation with your kid; consider recording it on camera and revisiting that movie (or pictures) on future birthdays.

Now, let's get this party started!

Things You Will Need

- Jar or box
- Pens, pencils
- Scissors
- Colored paper
- Tape or glue

Talk About It

After the party, when things have calmed down, ask your kid whether the donation idea worked. Did any of the friends who came ask why your kid was doing this? Is it possible that some of them may try this on their birthdays? After you have made the donation, ask whether your kid would be interested in doing it again on the next birthday.