



Happy First Birthday!

Marco's 1st birthday

I get the call, "We're having a birthday party for our one year old can you come?" I explain a clown may not be appropriate for a first birthday party. "Well there will be another 20-25 children there and their parents and we want it to be special for him to remember and by the way we want you there for three hours. The party starts at one and goes until seven." Against my better judgment and at the insistence of the parent I agree to perform at the party-for an hour and a half- she wants me to arrive at 2pm."

I arrive at the house and the party is so loud no one hears the door bell ring for almost five minutes. The mother answers the door in an apron, Marco in her arms, crying and with 25 children at her feet vying for the best clown viewing position. Dad is videotaping the grand entrance.

Happy Birthday Marco I say quietly, he is handed to a grandmother. I'm ushered into the party area and Marco has been taken away from grandmother and handed to aunty who passes him on to another person. I begin my show and the grandparents bring Marco who is still crying, up to the front with me. It is his birthday and of course he is to be the centre of attention. Mom is in the kitchen trying to feed everyone, dad drops the videotaping and goes outside to light the barbecue. Uncles are loudly watching soccer and Marco who is shoved in my face desperately needs a nap and an obvious diaper change. Camera's are flashing, kids are yelling and the dog is in the Cheetos.

What a memory. Even if he can't remember this and he won't, the pictures will reflect how much he really didn't enjoy all of this.

Mom whisks Marco away and I don't see him, mom or dad until I'm walking out the door. Neither had a chance to enjoy their son, the performance or the party.

In some cultures a first birthday marks a child's entrance into the world. Therefore a huge party is thrown for the child. Extended family and friends are invited. Some of these parties are larger than some weddings I've attended! If your culture dictates that you must throw a huge first birthday party go for broke. Rent a hall, get a caterer, an entertainer, and have the celebration of a life time. Neither you nor your child will forget it. It will be wonderful. **Just don't try and do it all yourself.**

However, if budget is a concern and you must host an in home party for your baby consider this:

1. **Who to invite:** Invite a combination of grandparents, god parents and few of your close friends.
2. **Number of guests:** With this simple list above you could easily have up to 10-15 guests. Remember your baby needs a lot of attention and care at this time in their life. Invite a number of guests you think you can host while still meeting the needs of your baby.
3. **Number of Children:** Inviting young cousins and young neighbours can make a party difficult to host at this stage. If you can try to keep the number of young children you invite to a minimum. If it is unavoidable and you must invite young cousins and young neighbours to your party, plan one activity for these children. Plan an activity they can do with little or no assistance from you, such as back yard bubble blowing, side walk chalk drawings or make edible cereal necklaces using shoe string licorice. If they need assistance they will have at least one adult (at least one of this child's parents should attend) to them to help.





Happy First Birthday! Continued.

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4. Time: Avoid planning your party during nap or "cranky" times. Keep the duration of your party short 1-2 hour maximum. Consider hosting an after breakfast before lunch time party i.e. 10am-12:30pm or an after nap time before dinner time party i.e. 4pm-6:30pm or invite people over after dinner for just cake and coffee.
5. Activities: Since this party is not about "entertaining" your child, planned activities are not necessary. However, you could put a photo album for people to look at to see just how much your child has grown and changed. Open presents. Let your child dive into their cake.
6. What to serve: Keep it simple. Order something in or have a simple ready to serve meal, have friends bring food to share. Use paper plates, cups and utensils for easy clean up.
7. Solicit help: Ask an uncle or friend to take pictures or video the party. In doing this you get to be actively involved with your child and not stuck watching the party pass by through the lens of a camera. Recruit a friend or relative to do dishes or set the table while you take care of your baby. Give grandparents the responsibility of hosting the planned activity for young guests.
8. Decorations: Not necessary, however hats or buttons or badges indicating who people are "Grama Janet" "Nonno Joe" are nice touches. Simple streamers or store bought happy birthday banners will set the tone. Balloons are not a good idea for a first birthday party. The loud popping noise can scare a young child. Likewise once a balloon has popped there is the potential for the child to pick up, swallow and choke on a broken piece of balloon.

