

The Event Planning Starter Checklist

10 Things to Do First When You're Put in Charge of a Family Gathering

By *Jequetta*

You said yes. Or you were voluntold. Either way, you're now in charge of planning a family event and you're not sure where to start.

Before you spiral into Pinterest boards and late-night Googling, take a breath. I've planned over 300 events—from Marine Corps Balls to family reunions to my grandson's first birthday—and I've learned that what you do first determines whether the rest of the process feels manageable or chaotic.

Here are the 10 things I do before anything else:

1. Define the event in one sentence.

Write down exactly what you're planning. "A 50th birthday dinner for Mom with 25 guests at a restaurant" is clear. "Something for Mom's birthday" is not. Clarity now saves confusion later.

2. Set the date (and a backup).

Nail this down before you do anything else. Check with the key people who absolutely must be there. Have a second option ready in case your first choice doesn't work.

3. Determine your budget.

Be honest with yourself. Write down the total amount you can spend. If others are contributing, confirm those amounts in writing. A vague budget leads to overspending every single time.

4. Create a rough guest list.

You don't need final confirmations yet. Just list everyone who might be invited so you have a sense of size. This affects every other decision—venue, food, seating, and cost.

5. Decide on the location.

Home, restaurant, park, rented space? Your guest count and budget will guide this. Don't book anything yet—just decide on the type of venue.

6. Identify your helpers.

You don't have to do this alone. Write down 2-3 people you can delegate to. Assign them a general area now: "Sarah handles decorations. Marcus handles music."

7. Start a note on your phone.

Every idea, task, or question that pops into your head goes here. This gets everything out of your brain and into one place. You'll organize it later.

8. Set your RSVP deadline.

Work backward from your event date. You'll need final numbers for food and seating. Give yourself at least one week between RSVP deadline and the event.

9. Research one thing.

Just one. Maybe it's catering options or venue availability or cake prices. This gives you momentum without overwhelming yourself.

10. Block time on your calendar.

Schedule actual planning sessions with yourself. Even 30 minutes twice a week keeps you moving forward without last-minute panic.

You've got your starting point. Now what?

This checklist gets you through the first few days. But what about the full timeline? The budget tracker? The menu planning? The day-of schedule?

That's where the complete Event Planning Blueprint for Family Celebrations comes in.

It's the same step-by-step system I've used for over 300 events—the timelines, templates, checklists, and recipes that take you from "I'm in charge" to "That was amazing" without the overwhelm.

[**Get the Full Blueprint for \\$27**](#)

Jequetta is a mother and grandmother who has been the family's "voluntold" event planner for over 30 years. She's planned everything from Marine Corps Balls to backyard birthdays and believes every gathering should be memorable for the host too—not just the guests.