

Birthday Party Planning Checklist

A simple, practical guide for milestone birthdays, adult celebrations, family parties, and special birthday events.

Guest of Honor: _____	Date: _____
Venue: _____	Estimated Guests: _____

8-12 Weeks Before

- Choose the party date and approximate start/end time.
- Set a realistic overall budget.
- Decide on the style: casual, themed, formal, surprise, dinner, dance party, backyard, etc.
- Create the initial guest list.
- Reserve the venue, if needed.
- Book key vendors early: DJ/entertainment, caterer, photographer, photo booth, rentals, or decorator.
- Choose a theme or color palette if you want one.
- For a surprise party, select one trusted person to coordinate communication with guests.

6-8 Weeks Before

- Send invitations or save-the-dates.
- Confirm food and beverage plans.
- Plan entertainment, music, games, or special activities.
- Order cake or desserts.
- Arrange tables, chairs, linens, tents, or other rentals.
- Begin collecting photos for a slideshow, memory table, or display.
- Decide whether there will be speeches, a toast, special dances, or a formal introduction.
- Create a rain or weather backup plan for outdoor events.

3-4 Weeks Before

- Review RSVPs and follow up with guests who have not responded.
- Finalize decorations, centerpieces, balloons, signage, or photo backdrop.
- Confirm the menu and serving plan.
- Choose special songs: entrance, cake, birthday spotlight, family dance, or favorite songs.
- Make a short 'must play' and 'do not play' music list for the DJ.
- Plan parking, accessibility, restrooms, and directions for guests.
- Confirm venue rules about alcohol, candles, confetti, noise, cleanup, or outside vendors.

1-2 Weeks Before

- Give the venue and vendors an updated guest count.
- Confirm arrival, setup, performance, and breakdown times with vendors.
- Create a simple event timeline.
- Decide who will greet guests and who will handle gifts/cards.
- Prepare speeches, announcements, trivia, games, or special presentations.
- Finish any slideshow or video presentation and test the files.
- Purchase nonperishable supplies, decorations, favors, and party essentials.
- Make a list of final payments, tips, or balances due.

2-3 Days Before

- Confirm final headcount.
- Check the weather and activate the backup plan if necessary.
- Pick up or organize decorations, favors, signs, and supplies.

- Prepare a labeled box or tote for items going to the venue.
- Charge phones, cameras, speakers, lights, or other personal electronics.
- Confirm who is transporting the cake, gifts, decorations, and special items.
- Share the final timeline with anyone who needs it.

Party Day - Before Guests Arrive

- Allow enough time for setup without rushing.
- Check tables, chairs, linens, lighting, decorations, and signage.
- Set up the gift/card area and any memory or photo displays.
- Make sure the cake/dessert area is ready.
- Confirm music and microphone needs with the DJ or entertainer.
- Test slideshow/video equipment before guests arrive.
- Make sure restrooms are stocked and clearly accessible.
- Place trash and recycling containers where they are easy to find.
- Keep valuables, purses, coats, and vendor equipment out of high-traffic areas.

During the Party

- Welcome the guest of honor at the planned time.
- Keep formalities short enough that the party still feels relaxed.
- Coordinate food service, speeches, cake, photos, and entertainment with the DJ/MC or event lead.
- Give guests enough unstructured time to socialize.
- Take group and family photos before people begin leaving.
- Watch the timing so important moments are not pushed to the very end.
- Assign someone other than the guest of honor to handle small problems.

Before the Party Ends

- Announce any final activity, group photo, last dance, or send-off.
- Make sure gifts, cards, personal decorations, and keepsakes are collected.
- Confirm cleanup responsibilities with the venue.
- Pack leftover food only if the venue/caterer permits it.
- Check for phones, coats, gifts, chargers, and other personal items.
- Make sure vendors have a safe, clear path for breakdown and load-out.

Quick Party Timeline

Time	Activity / Moment	Who Is Responsible?
_____	Guest arrival / social time	_____
_____	Guest of honor arrival / introduction	_____
_____	Meal / refreshments	_____
_____	Speeches / special presentation	_____
_____	Cake / birthday song	_____
_____	Entertainment / dancing / activities	_____
_____	Final announcement / last activity	_____

Planning Tip: The best birthday parties do not need a packed schedule. Plan the important moments, then leave room for guests to talk, laugh, dance, and enjoy the celebration.