

# Before You Throw a Holiday Party

by Terri Mauro

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You're having the family over for Thanksgiving, co-workers over for a Christmas Open House, friends over for New Year's Eve. How can you help your child enjoy the festivities, while crossing tantrums and meltdowns off the guest list? Here are eight things to try.

## ***Let your child hide his toys***

Don't make your child share all that he has with young cousins or friends. Give him plenty of time and assistance in putting favorite toys someplace where they won't be bothered. Make sure your child knows that he has a right to decide what gets played with -- but toys that are left out where other kids can see them are fair game for sharing.

## ***Give your child a privacy zone***

Determine an area of the house -- perhaps your child's room, or a playtent in an out-of-the-way spot -- that will be off limits to everybody else. Let your child slip off there when she needs a break, and encourage her to do so.

## ***Let your child help***

Get your child invested in the party plans. If there are some recipes he can help you cook, work him into kitchen duty. If she's brought home lots of holiday artwork from school, help her hang it around the room for decorations. Have your child make placecards for the table, a cute centerpiece, a door sign; invite her to open the door for new arrivals, collect jackets, take soft drink orders. A job can distract your child and give him something useful to concentrate on.

## ***Keep off-limits items out of reach***

If you don't want your child putting his face in the dip or his fingers in the cake frosting, keep them out of reach. It's no fun for either one of you to keep having to remind and reproach. Be sure you or someone else is always available to make a plate up for your child and find an appropriate place for sitting and snacking.

## ***Put your child "in charge" of younger kids***

If your child plays better with younger children, then have him help little cousins and friends with puzzles and toys. Whether he plays nicely with them or enjoys being a bit of a supervisor, it will keep him occupied and happy, at least for a while.

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***Ask sympathetic friends or family members to step in***

You're likely to get swept up in party duties, so ask a friend or relative who really understands and gets along well with your child to keep an eye out and engage her regularly. If you can line up a few people to take turns, nobody will miss too much socializing time.

***Try to stick to routines***

It may be hard amid all the merrymaking, but try to stick to your usual family routines if you possibly can. Having the party over before bedtime, serving meals close to your normal time, slipping away from the group to perform any little rituals like storytime or playtime -- whatever you invest in keeping things normal will pay off in less abnormal, over-the-top behavior.

***Give plenty of praise***

If your child's doing a great job handling party stress, give her lots of positive reinforcement. Compliments and high-fives and maybe a sticker or two go a long way toward keeping good behavior coming. A happy child makes for a happy party, and that's a pretty good goal.