

The birthday party host – a valued role for children

Jane Gilkes

Over the years Curtis had been invited to many of his class-mates birthday parties. We realised that to find his place among his peers he should be the host of his own party, just like everyone else had been. Curtis didn't want to offend anyone and leave them off his invitation list, so he decided that he would invite the whole class and then some. So we sent out thirty invitations and received twenty eight replies. Matt and I then freaked out because we weren't expecting the whole class to attend and we had no idea what twenty eight kids (mostly boys) were going to enjoy. How in the world we were going to keep them entertained for three hours?

Then I remembered attending a birthday party for a friend's daughter who had had a clown come to do a show. A clown party would be suitable for a bunch of seven year olds. Now, I was thinking how awesome I was and things were set because I'd come up with a great idea. These thoughts quickly turned to mush when all contact details for the clown were incorrect. After much investigation, I found out that she had retired from clowning. Darn, what am I going to do? I decided I wasn't going to let retirement get in the way of a good idea so I found out that the lady clown worked for an organisation that provided Out Of School Hours care (OOSH) and contacted her there. The moons aligned for us and the clown came out of retirement for our party! I told her about the kinds of things Curtis enjoys as well as explaining to her that Curtis uses an iPad and switches for communication and a wheelchair to get around. That didn't concern her at all.

The day of the party came and we were very nervous. We later found out that some of the other parents were, too. Parents were unsure what to expect and how they and their kids should behave at a party for a child with disability. We gave the parents the option of leaving but most stayed.

When everyone had arrived, we fed them all and then gathered the kids in preparation for the clown to arrive. She arrived with great fan fair and the kids mobbed her. For the next one and a half hours the party-goers were totally entertained and engaged. There was not one peep out of any of them and we and all the parents watched the magic of all the kids playing together. The lady clown was a natural and knew how to make the birthday boy and host the centre of all the attention and activity. Curtis thought it was pretty awesome being at the centre of everything. He loved helping with all the magic tricks, being tossed in the air on a parachute and playing with the bubbles. He tells me, however, that the best part of the day was all his friends coming to his birthday, playing with him and each one taking a balloon animal home with them.

In the week following Curtis' party, his teacher informed me that it was the only news story from all the kids in the class for a whole week. It was the biggest news. Curtis' party had been a huge success and loved by all.

Since that great day, Curtis has been invited on many play dates and we have had many of his friends over as well. He has forged some very close friendships with a number of children in his year. They love talking to him, making him laugh, playing with him and pretending his wheelchair is a dirt bike. His best friend comes around every Friday. Sometimes I think these kids know and understand his likes and dislikes more than we do.

We are so pleased that Curtis is known and connected to his school friends and happy he has some true friends. Friends who love and care for him as a person with his unique gifts and personality.



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