



Too cool for clowns?

Five birthday party ideas your preteen will love

By Karren L. Johnson | 11/30/09



Tweens ...they're not quite teenagers, but they're too old for Pin the Tail on the Donkey.

When it comes to birthday parties, it can be a bit challenging to come up with something they will enjoy, as Chandricka Mose of Laurel discovered while planning her daughter's 10th birthday celebration last May.

"I wanted something that would be perfect for a little girl who thinks she's growing up," says Mose. "So I began thinking of ways to make her feel more mature."

What she came up with was a day of pampering for her daughter and 15 of her girlfriends — complete with manicure, pedicure, facial and relaxation stations — all in the comfort of their home.

From spa parties to video game tournaments to rock climbing, check out these "grown up" ideas for your tween's next birthday bash.

1. A Little Pampering

A spa party like Mose's can be as simple as inviting a few of your daughter's friends over to paint nails, do face masks and style each other's hair. Or you can go all out by recreating a spa in your home complete with aromatherapy candles, foot soaks and relaxing music. If you want the works, but don't want the job of pulling it all together, consider a business like Thumbs Up Party Planning (www.thumbsupparty.com), which offers a Girlfriend Glamour Spa Party. This is what Mose had for her daughter.

From fluffy robes and soft slippers to manicure, pedicure, facial and relaxation stations, a big part of what makes the party so unique is the equipment, says Thumbs Up owner Laura Betz. Personalized water bottles, color coordinated table settings, relaxing music and spa games are the icing on the cake.

"The girls love how extravagant and grown up it makes them feel and parents love that we take care of everything," says Betz.

In fact, with the "extravaganza" package, which begins at \$345 for eight girls, the only thing parents have to worry about is food and drinks. Everything else from invitations and goody bags to the party cake and thank you notes is included.

"I was able to just sit back and watch my daughter enjoy her special day," says Mose.

MORE COOL IDEAS:

Plan your own Ultimate Beading Party (www.amazingmoms.com/htm/partybead.htm) or Young Artists Theatre in West Laurel offers a Makeup and Modeling Party complete with a fashion show (www.yatheatre.com).

2. Gaming Fun

Imagine a dozen kids playing life-sized bowling and Mario Kart Wii on giant screens in your home. Thanks to Detonation Games, Inc., of Potomac, your young gaming guru can have the birthday party of his or her dreams. “We bring all the equipment to your home, including games, Wii systems and 80-inch-screens,” says Alex Campbell, the company’s game master, who stays during the party to keep everything running safe and smooth. Party packages are \$250 and \$350 for up to 12 simultaneous players.

Or you can put on a gaming party of your own. For ideas, check out “How to Throw a Wii Party for your Child” on www.ehow.com. According to the article, the best fun is had by setting up tournaments where kids compete against one another. Other fun ideas include allowing kids to create their own Mii characters, providing T-shirts for each team to wear, and setting up snack stations where kids can take breaks and refuel between games.

Do-it-yourself party planners might also want to check out one of the latest Wii games, “Birthday Party Bash,” which offers 20 birthday party favorites including classics like piñatas, Pin-the-Tail-on-the-Donkey, Musical Chairs, Hot Potato, sack races and more.

MORE COOL IDEAS:

Red Zone Adventures in Timonium offers laser tag, glow-in-the-dark miniature golf and arcade games (www.redzoneadventures.com); Dave & Busters in Hanover has games ranging from dance offs to high-speed racing simulators (www.daveandbusters.com).

3. Take it Outdoors

Scavenger hunts are always a hit at birthday parties. But for the older kids, you need to make it more challenging. That was the motivation behind the “Scavenger Hunt on the Trail” birthday party offered at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills for ages 8 to 13, says Monica Wiedel-Lubinski, the center’s arts program coordinator.

“Our goal is to provide an opportunity for kids to learn more about nature, explore the world around them and gain an appreciation for the environment, all while having fun with their friends,” says Wiedel-Lubinski.

Party guests can enjoy a guided hike through the wetlands while searching for clues on the trail to find a hidden treasure. The party is offered year round, but Wiedel-Lubinski says her favorite time for exploring trails is in the winter when you can see animal tracks in the snow.

Other birthday parties at the center geared toward tweens include Campfire Circle, Land of Reptiles and Feeding Time — all of which introduce kids to resident critters. Parties are \$250 for nonmembers with a maximum group size of 20 and run for two hours with one hour of instructor-led activities and one hour of party time in a reserved classroom (www.explorenature.org).

“We take pride in offering kids a low-tech, unplugged and wholesome birthday option,” says Wiedel-Lubinski.

MORE COOL IDEAS:

Maryland Sled Dog Adventures in Baltimore treats kids to harnessing and feeding the dogs, as well as individual sled rides (www.marylanddogsledding.com); Broken Eagle Adventures, Inc. in White Marsh offers customized group adventures in backpacking, camping, pioneering, orienteering and more (410-529-6421).

4. Think Extreme

Exercise, a sense of confidence and hands-on fun are just a few of the many things kids gain from an Earth Treks birthday party, says Chris Everett, director of sales and marketing for the indoor climbing center with locations in Columbia, Lutherville and Rockville (www.earthtreksclimbing.com).

“With a range of climbs suited for all ages and ability levels and the support of experienced instructors, kids can enjoy climbing to their hearts content,” says Everett. “Parents like the fact that the party can be as structured or unstructured as they want.”

Earth Treks parties, which Everett says are extremely popular among tweens because of the “extreme” factor, include a printable invitation, two hours of climbing in a private area, one instructor to every five climbers, equipment and a T-shirt for the birthday child. Packages begin at \$225 for up to 10 kids. Party favor bags are available at an additional cost.

Rosanne Hoffman of Kensington, who recently planned an Earth Treks party for her 9-year-old daughter, says the team building aspect of the party was a hit.

“All the girls would cheer and hug each other after their climbs,” says Hoffman. “It was very moving.”

In fact, watching all the children conquer their fears and challenge themselves to try something new inspired

Hoffman to celebrate her 40th birthday at Earth Treks with four of her close girlfriends.

MORE COOL IDEAS:

Pump It Up in Owings Mills and Elkridge offers the excitement of jumping, bouncing and sliding for any age (www.pumpitupparty.com); Hannah More Skate Park in Reisterstown is a 12,800-square-foot supervised skate facility (410-887-1142).

5. Oldies but Goodies

Nothing beats a good 'ole fashion roller skating or bowling party. In fact they're still just as popular with kids today as they were 30 years ago, says Kristie Suchomma, general manager of Towson Lanes (www.amf.com/towsonlanes).

To increase the cool factor with the older kids, Suchomma says the center offers an "Xtreme" bowling birthday party, complete with strobe lights, glow-in-the-dark features and the latest dance music. Shoe rentals, food and drinks are also included.

"It's all about providing an atmosphere for the kids to socialize," says Barbara Schnyder, who has been a DJ at the Columbia Skate Arena (www.columbiaskatearena.org) for nearly 30 years. "Roller skating is just such a great ice breaker."

Twelve-year-old Philip Milman is a big roller skating fan, according to his mom, Tina Milman. In fact, his last two birthday parties were at Columbia Skate Arena and he's having his bar mitzvah there next year, as well.

"All of his friends love to skate and do the limbo," says Milman. "I love the fact that it's something the entire family can join in on."

MORE COOL IDEAS:

SplashDown birthday party at Columbia Swim Center is part water slide, part flume ride, and part swimming (www.columbiaassociation.net). Laurel Golf Center offers several Miniature Golf birthday party packages (www.laurelgolfcenter.com).

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