

## **RSVP – What can you do when people don't reply?**

When I started organising parties for my children I thought that this only happened to me, but researching children's parties and chatting to parents over the years has made me realise that this problem is far more widespread.

As a hostess, you've put a lot of time and effort into organising an amazing party for your child. The invitation were sent out in plenty of time and written very clearly (offering a variety of methods that parents can use to RSVP). A few parents responded as soon as they received your invitation, but you've not heard back from the others and are starting to worry.

### **So, what do you do and why is it so important for parents to RSVP?**

Although my children simply want to know which of their friends can come to the party, for me this issue is partly about politeness – but mostly about knowing how many people you expect on the day in order to plan/prepare properly.

Reasons why numbers matter when you're organising a children's party can include.

- Knowing how many children you are catering for – not only in terms of food and drink but also in terms of plates, cups, table wear etc
- Being able to provide a party bag for each child without being left with lots of spare ones to take home.
- The cost of the activity or soft play centre you've booked is calculated on a "per child" basis.
- The venue/entertainer has asked you to confirm numbers.
- Some entertainers charge different amounts depending on the number of children present on the day.
- The type of party you are having means that you have to pay/book tickets in advance.

Therefore, when parents don't RSVP it can be very frustrating because you have to estimate how many children will turn up. This can make managing your costs, buying food, partyware and items for party bags difficult because you don't want lots of leftovers. It also means that you tend to be more worried on the day itself, just in case more children turn up than you estimated.

### **What can I do to help myself?**

Over the years, I have tried a few things in order to maximise the number of RSVPs we receive, including.

- Providing as many different RSVP methods as I'm happy with (usually landline, mobile number and email – but I have also included SAE's on occasion). Most of my responses arrive by text.
- Giving a clear RSVP deadline.
- Reminding parents about the invitation a few days before the deadline, talking to them in person if possible or dropping them a text, email, follow up note. When I do this, I normally let them know that if I haven't heard from them by the RSVP deadline I will assume they are not coming.

Sometimes, it's not easy to ask parents who haven't RSVP'd yet what their plans are, especially if you don't know them very well. Most of us don't want to be regarded as someone who "hassles" people about invitations. However, looking at it from your point of view – not knowing how many children to expect can create a lot more problems and worry for you than simply asking someone if their child would like to come to your party. I find that it's much better to ask than not.

Combining these methods has worked very well, as we've had a 100% response rate for my children's party invitations for a few years now.

### **Before you get too irate about the fact that people haven't RSVP'd, try and remember the following.**

- Although the party is one of the things at the top of your mind, it won't be as important to other people. Sometimes people just need a polite reminder in order to realise that they haven't responded yet, and then they will let you know one way or another.
- The invitation might not have made it home (a few different friends have told me about separate occasions when invitations arrived home from school after the party itself – the parents were mortified because they were not even aware of the party).
- They might have a few different things on that day and still be trying to work out if their child can attend.
- You don't know what is going on in other people's daily lives.

### **What if you still don't hear back from people?**

When people still haven't let you know, and your RSVP deadline has passed, you have to make a decision about what to do next.

If you're in a situation where you will end up with a few spare items for your party anyway (this can happen because most party ware/party bag items are sold in packs of a certain number) and exact numbers are not that vital to your plans then you can afford to be more relaxed about this.

**However, here are some options if you do need to know exact numbers (for any reason, including the entertainer, activity, venue or other party items).**

- You can take the approach that because they did not respond by the RSVP deadline (despite reminders) you are going to assume they are not coming.
- You can try to contact them again, politely reminding them about the party and explaining why you need to know exact numbers. Remember that you don't have time to give them a few days to get back to you any more.
- You can talk to the person who needs to know exact numbers and explain the situation. Find out what happens if you overpay, or if more children show up on the day than expected. Most people involved in children's parties know how difficult it is to get a response from everyone you've invited – there may be some flexibility (you never know unless you ask).

I would always recommend talking to your entertainer, venue, etc in any case – just so that they are aware of the situation regarding numbers.

### **What do I do if more children show up than expected?**

It's party day (hooray) and some people still haven't let you know whether their child is coming or not. As far as you know, these children might just show up at the party, which means that you need to be prepared.

As mentioned before, it may be that exact numbers are not important for your party and you have a few extra plates, cups, party bags etc. If this is the case then a few unexpected children shouldn't worry you.

When you know that you might have more children than expected – I would advise providing some "spare" party bags, plates etc. Although you might want to, these don't have to match the other items you've bought – they can simply be plain ones that you could use for another occasion if they're not needed. The "spare" party bags don't need to have all the items in. Obviously, it's great if you have some extra items that you can put in them but they could simply have a few sweets in them. This way no one feels left out but you're not left with lots of unused party items.

You will have spoken to your entertainer, venue, etc recently anyway. Therefore, you should already know what will happen if more children show up than you were expecting and have worked out the best way of dealing with this (for example, how are you going to pay any extra costs on the day?).

### **And Finally ....**

Don't get upset about the lack of RSVPs and let it take over your party, concentrate on how amazing the party will be and how much the children who are attending will enjoy it.

And, always remember to RSVP to any invitations your child receives as soon as you can.

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