Birthday Party Checklist for a 4-Year-Old Boy

A birthday is the one day of the year when a small person is told, out loud and in public, that he matters. Your job, for one afternoon, is to make that easy to believe. This guide is for the parent in the middle of the planning, list in hand, wondering where to begin.

👶 Age 4 | 📍 Woking | ⏱️ 90 minutes or 2.5 hours | ✅ Tick-off checklist

Updated October 2026. Venue prices and details were read from each venue's own website on 9-11 October 2026. Always confirm with the venue before you book.

PICTURE THIS

A Saturday afternoon in Woking. A hall that smells of squash and balloons. Eight small boys, one of them turning four, all quite certain the world was arranged for their benefit. Near the door a parent holds a tray of sandwiches and a list that is already three items behind. Nobody in the room will remember the napkins. Every child will remember whether someone laughed with him. Planning a party is the long, unglamorous work of making that one afternoon easy.

START HERE

What's different about a 4-year-old's party

A four-year-old is a small person with large opinions and a short supply of patience. Build the party to his size.

Four is a lovely age for a party: children can play together and love a theme, but they still need short activities, simple food and a parent close by. Plan around that and the day usually runs smoothly. Here's what we'd want another parent to tell us.

- **Keep it short, even if it feels too short.** The American Academy of Pediatrics' parenting site suggests keeping toddler parties under 90 minutes, with about 10 to 15 minutes per game or activity. Local venues are similar: Mazzy Bees runs 90-minute party slots. Shorter is kinder to children who tire quickly, and to you.

- **Keep the group small.** The same source gives a rule of thumb of the child's age plus one, so about five guests for a 4-year-old, because big crowds can overwhelm young children. It's okay to invite fewer children than you think you "should". Many venues set higher minimums (Chobham Adventure Farm's packages start at 10 children), so choose the venue first, then set the guest list.
- **Parents usually stay.** Most 4-year-olds still want a familiar adult close by, so you'll be hosting the grown-ups as well as the children. Plan food and space for them too.
- **Plan around nap and meal times.** A tired or hungry 4-year-old is the biggest party risk, and every parent knows how that ends. Late morning or early afternoon often works best.
- **Expect some wobbles.** A shy or overwhelmed guest may want a cuddle or a quiet corner, and that's completely normal. Set a corner aside.
- **Toilet trips are frequent.** Know where the toilets are and bring spare clothes.

THE PLAN

Countdown checklist

Good parties are made quietly, weeks before, by people who write things down.

Start about eight weeks before the party. It sounds early, but weekend slots go first, and booking calmly beats scrambling. Work through these in order, and tick them off as you go. Your ticks are saved on this device.

8 weeks before

- [ ] Set a budget covering venue, food, cake, party bags and any entertainer. Parties add up fast, so write the total down before you start looking.
- [ ] Ask your son to choose a theme, offering two options ("dinosaurs or football?"). Or keep it simple.
- [ ] Choose the type: soft play, an activity venue, a hall with an entertainer, or home.
- [ ] Draft the guest list, then check it against venue minimums and maximums.
- [ ] Pick two or three possible dates. Weekends book up first.

Theme ideas that tend to work: dinosaurs, superheroes (generic capes and masks are easy), trains and diggers, football, space, pirates, farm animals, racing cars. A simple theme (a colour scheme, one activity, a matching cake) costs less than themed everything, and it's easier on you.

6-8 weeks before

- [ ] Shortlist 2-3 venues and ask each the questions below.
- [ ] Book, pay any deposit, and save the confirmation email. Future you will thank you when you can't remember the time.
- [ ] Send the **Save the Date** (text in the invitation section below).
- [ ] Check the age limit on every activity.

4-6 weeks before

- [ ] Send the invitations, including the **dietary question**.
- [ ] Set an RSVP date about two weeks before the party.
- [ ] Book an entertainer if you want one. Short, interactive sessions suit this age.
- [ ] Order or plan the cake.
- [ ] Plan the schedule (samples below).

2-3 weeks before

- [ ] Chase RSVPs with a friendly text. Nobody minds, and most parents are relieved to be asked.
- [ ] Collect allergies and dietary needs, and pass them to the venue or caterer.
- [ ] Confirm numbers and the food order. Some venues need it about 10 days ahead (Woking Leisure Centre does).
- [ ] Plan party bags, or skip them if the venue includes them.
- [ ] Buy decorations, candles and a lighter.
- [ ] Line up helpers for photos, food and supervision. You can't do all three yourself.

Party week

- [ ] Confirm time, address and arrival time with the venue.
- [ ] Check the weather and have a wet-weather plan.
- [ ] Pack the party kit.
- [ ] Tell your son what to expect and who is coming, so he feels excited rather than overwhelmed.
- [ ] Print the guest list with parent phone numbers and allergies.
- [ ] Charge your phone and power bank.

Questions to ask every venue

These are the questions that tend to matter once you're standing in the room with ten excited children.

- [ ] Is it suitable for 4-year-olds? Are there age limits on any activity?
- [ ] What are the minimum and maximum numbers of children?
- [ ] Is the space shared with other parties or public play, or exclusive to you? What does exclusive cost?
- [ ] How long are the play time and the food time?
- [ ] What's included: food, drinks, party bags, a host, invitations?
- [ ] Do adults pay, and how many can or must stay?
- [ ] Can you bring your own cake or food?
- [ ] How do they handle allergies and dietary needs?
- [ ] What are the deposit and cancellation terms?

- [ ] Is there parking, and is it free?

THEME PLAYBOOK

4 themes with games, food and a cake for a four-year-old boy

Pick one and you have the games, the menu and the cake sorted. Each idea has three games you can run without a host, plus local people who can run it for you where we have found them.

Ninja Warrior Challenge

Four-year-olds will happily crawl, jump and balance for an hour, so a ninja course is a good fit. A black headband and a paper belt turn any hall into a training ground.

- Dojo course: crawl under a table, step across a line of tape, balance along a low bench and ring a bell at the end.
- Silent ninjas: creep across the room without a sound and freeze when the 'sensei' turns round.
- Belt ceremony: finish with a paper belt for every ninja, and a bow.

Food and cake: Ninja snacks: rice cakes, sandwich rolls and fruit. For cake, a black-iced sponge with a red headband stripe.

Party bag: A headband and a sticker.

Tip: This is a home version for now: Ninja Warrior UK Guildford has a minimum age of 5, so save the real course for next year.

Browse ninja warrior challenge supplies in the shop

Shark Attack

A shark theme gives you navy, grey and white and lots of room for noise. Four-year-olds enjoy a gentle scare more than a loud one.

- Sharks and minnows: one shark stands in the middle while the minnows run across, then swap. Keep a grown-up as referee.
- Fin parade: card fins on headbands, then circle the room humming the shark tune.
- Treasure fishing: dip into a tub of paper fish with a magnet rod.

Food and cake: Fish-shaped sandwiches, blueberries and cheesy crackers. For cake, a blue sponge with a card fin.

Party bag: A shark sticker sheet or a small foam shark.

Tip: A blue tablecloth with scrunched blue crepe paper makes a convincing ocean in minutes.

Browse shark attack supplies in the shop

Fire and Police Academy

A hat, a badge and a siren are everything at four. Run the party as a training day, with a pretend call-out and a certificate at the end.

- Hose race: a relay across the garden with a sponge and a bucket of water (outdoors only).
- Stop and go: one child is the officer who holds up a hand while the others run and stop.
- Rescue mission: hide teddies and have the rescue team find them and bring them back safely.

Food and cake: Sausage rolls, strawberries and fruit. For cake, a red sponge with a toy fire engine on top.

Party bag: A paper badge, a sticker or a toy whistle.

Tip: Ask a local fire or police station if they run any community events, though visits aren't guaranteed.

Browse fire and police academy supplies in the shop

Big Build Site

Four-year-olds can follow a short plan, so give them a job each: a hard hat, a high-vis tabard and a mission to move 'bricks'.

- Brick relay: move cardboard 'bricks' from one end of the room to the other in teams.
- Dig for gold: a tray of shredded paper or sand hides plastic 'gold' to find.
- Tallest tower: pairs stack cups or blocks, and everyone wins a prize for height or style.

Food and cake: 'Brick' cheese sandwiches, fruit salad and breadsticks. For cake, a chocolate sponge with a toy digger on top.

Party bag: A hard hat or a sticker.

Tip: Use cardboard boxes as 'bricks': they cost nothing and work as well as toy blocks.

Browse big build site supplies in the shop

> Planning for a girl instead? See the 4-year-old girls' party checklist, which has different themes.

THE AFTERNOON

Schedules, games and bags

Time is the one ingredient you can't buy more of, so spend it in small portions.

The best way to calm party nerves is to have a plan for the time. A 90-minute party with two or three short activities is plenty for a 4-year-old. Venue parties will set their own timings.

A 90-minute party

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
0:00	Guests arrive, free play or a simple craft (colouring, stickers, mask decorating)
0:10	Welcome and a short, energetic game (musical statues or follow-the-leader)
0:25	Main activity: entertainer, soft play, bouncy castle or treasure hunt (10-15 minutes each)
0:55	Wash hands and sit down for food
1:15	Birthday cake and singing
1:25	Party bags, goodbyes and hand-over to parents

If your party runs 2.5 hours

Sometimes the slot, or the plan, is longer. A 2.5-hour party is longer than the under-90-minutes advice for young children, so build in two calm breaks, and keep each activity to 10-15 minutes. It works best at home or in a hall, where arrivals and goodbyes take up part of the time. Expect energy to dip after the first 90 minutes or so, so make the second half gentler.

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
0:00	Guests arrive, free play or a craft table (arrivals are staggered, so keep this relaxed)
0:15	Welcome and a circle game: a name game or musical statues
0:30	Active block: entertainer, bouncy castle, soft play or treasure hunt (two activities of about 15 minutes)
1:00	Calm break: story or colouring, a water break and toilet trip
1:15	Second active block: obstacle course, pass the parcel or a second entertainer segment (30 minutes)
1:45	Wash hands and sit down for food
2:10	Birthday cake and singing

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
2:20	Quiet wind-down game or story, then party bags and goodbyes

- [ ] Have at least two helpers so one adult can take a child to the toilet without stopping the party.
- [ ] Keep a spare activity (bubbles, a colouring sheet) in case a game flops.
- [ ] Put a quiet corner in place before the second half, when tiredness starts.
- [ ] Check your venue allows 2.5 hours. Many soft play and farm slots are 90 minutes to under 2 hours.

Easy games for 4-year-olds

You don't need clever games. Simple and silly works best.

- [ ] Musical statues or bumps, where nobody is "out".
- [ ] Pass the parcel with a small gift in every layer, so everyone wins.
- [ ] Treasure hunt with picture clues, or "find the dinosaur eggs".
- [ ] Follow the leader or an obstacle course (cushions, hoops, cardboard-box tunnels).
- [ ] Bubbles or a bubble machine.
- [ ] Red light, green light, or limbo.
- [ ] Colouring or mask decorating as a calm break.

Avoid games with winners and eliminations. They can end in tears at this age, and you'll be the one comforting a disappointed 4-year-old in front of everyone.

Party bags

Keep them small and useful: bubbles, stickers, a mini car or dinosaur, a themed mask, or a slice of cake in a napkin. Skip small parts that could be a choking hazard, and check toys suit the age range.

LOOK AFTER THEM

Food, drink and safety

At a party, love mostly looks like paying attention.

Food and drink

- [ ] Keep it simple: sandwiches, mini pizzas, sausage rolls, fruit, vegetable sticks, crisps or breadsticks.
- [ ] Label food clearly and plan for the allergies and dietary needs on your RSVPs.
- [ ] Cut grapes, cherries, berries, strawberries and cherry tomatoes into quarters (NHS).
- [ ] Don't give whole nuts or popcorn to children under 5 (NHS).
- [ ] Seat children to eat and supervise them while they do. The NHS advises young children should always be supervised while eating.

- [ ] Offer water or diluted squash, with lids or straws if possible.
- [ ] Keep sweets small: a treat plus the cake is enough.
- [ ] Have food and a drink for the adults too. You'll be glad of a cup of tea.

Balloons and safety

- [ ] Be careful with balloons. St. Louis Children's Hospital advises that latex balloons aren't recommended for children under 8, and that broken pieces should be collected immediately and kept out of reach.
- [ ] Never leave children unsupervised around inflatables, water or outdoor areas.
- [ ] Check the venue's adult-to-child ratio fits your group. Woking Leisure Centre publishes a ratio for each party type.
- [ ] Keep a list of parents' phone numbers, allergies and medications.
- [ ] Note where the first-aid kit and emergency exits are.

THE DAY ITSELF

Party kit, the day itself and afterwards

Pack the night before. The morning belongs to the children.

The day goes better when the bag is already by the door. Here's what's worth having with you.

Party kit to pack

- [ ] Cake, candles, lighter, knife, plates and napkins (if bringing your own).
- [ ] Decorations and tape.
- [ ] Party bags.
- [ ] Spare socks. Many play venues need grip socks.
- [ ] Wet wipes, tissues and a small first-aid kit.
- [ ] Spare clothes for the birthday boy, plus a few spares for accidents.
- [ ] Printed guest list with parent phone numbers and allergies.
- [ ] Camera or phone, and a power bank.
- [ ] Bin bags for the tidy-up.
- [ ] Small prizes if you're playing pass the parcel.

On the day

Try to enjoy it. The children won't remember whether the napkins matched.

- [ ] Arrive 15-30 minutes early to set up, and ask what the venue allows.
- [ ] Meet the party host and confirm the timings.
- [ ] Tick every child and parent off your guest list.

- [ ] Keep a calm corner for any child who needs a break.
- [ ] Put one adult on photos so you're in some of them too.
- [ ] Check food against allergies before serving.
- [ ] Hand each child to a parent with their party bag.

After the party

When the last guest has gone, the room will look as if a small storm passed through. That is how you'll know it went well.

- [ ] Pay any balance and check for unexpected charges.
- [ ] Send a quick thank-you to parents and guests.
- [ ] Back up the photos.
- [ ] Write down what worked for next year.
- [ ] Open presents at home, calmly. Many 4-year-olds are overwhelmed after a big party, so give him time to wind down.

📍 NEAR YOU

Woking-area venues that suit a 4-year-old

A price is only the beginning of the sentence.

When you're comparing venues, the headline price is only part of it. What you want to know is what's included and what you'll still have to organise. For 10 children, Mazzy Bees' Party Corner is the cheapest of the three at £195-£225 for the party, against £290-£390 at Chobham. Details below were read from each venue's own site on 9-11 October 2026. They change, and several pages omit deposits and cancellation terms, so confirm before you book.

VENUE	AGE FIT	PRICE AND WHAT'S INCLUDED
Mazzy Bees Soft Play, Sheerwater	Soft play designed for ages 0-8	**Party Corner:** up to 10 children, £225 peak (weekends, half term) or £195 off-peak, per party. A 90-minute slot during public play: 45 minutes play, 15 minutes food, 30 minutes disco and karaoke or play. Includes sandwiches, unlimited squash and crisps. **Exclusive hire:** £490 for up to 15 children, then £12.99 per extra child, up to 40. Add-ons: party bags £3 per child, pizza and chips £4.50 per child.

VENUE	AGE FIT	PRICE AND WHAT'S INCLUDED
Chobham Adventure Farm, Chobham	Weekday package from age 1, weekend packages from age 4	Minimum 10 children. £29 per child (term-time weekdays, 3pm-5.30pm), £35 (weekends) or £39 (weekends, with an animal barn visit). Includes 1 hour 15 minutes of play, 45 minutes in a party room, pizza, ice cream, squash, party bags, a host and one free adult per child invited. Bring your own cake.
Woking Leisure Centre, Kingfield Road	Inflatazone party listed for ages 4+	**Inflatazone Exclusive:** £580.90, up to 60 children, catering extra and paid at least 10 days before. A party is one hour plus a 45-minute tea slot, paid in full on booking with no deposit. A shared Inflatazone party (up to 25 children) is also offered, but its price isn't on the current ticket page and an older price list showed it well below the exclusive price, so ask. Playstore soft play has a toddler party and a 5-12 adventure party. The older list says the toddler party is for ages 3-4, the current page says under 4s, so ask which fits.

What stands out from a parent's seat

- **Mazzy Bees:** the Party Corner runs during public play, so other families will be around. The page doesn't list a deposit or cancellation terms, so ask. Food, squash and a disco are included, and extras like party bags are priced separately.
- **Chobham:** food, party bags and a host are included, which means less for you to organise, and one free adult per child invited means a grandparent can come along without a ticket. You can bring your own cake. The minimum is 10 children.
- **Woking Leisure Centre:** no deposit, but you pay in full when you book, so check the cancellation terms. Catering is extra, ordered and paid at least 10 days before. The exclusive party is built for big groups (up to 60), so it makes most sense when numbers are high.

Rugged Earth Adventures' Nerf and bushcraft parties start from about age 6, so save them for later birthdays.

Browse all Woking party venues

ASKED AT TEN AT NIGHT

Questions parents ask

How many children should I invite to a 4-year-old's party?

About five is the rule of thumb (age plus one), because big groups can overwhelm young children. It's fine to keep it small. Venue minimums often push the number higher, so choose the venue first (Chobham's packages start at 10 children, for example), then set the guest list. A smaller group is easier to supervise and cheaper.

How long should the party last?

Around 90 minutes at most is a good target, with 10 to 15 minutes per activity. Venue slots are in this range: Mazzy Bees runs 90-minute parties, and Woking Leisure Centre runs one hour of activity plus a 45-minute tea. If you're hosting at home or in a hall and want longer, use the 2.5-hour schedule, with its two calm breaks.

Should parents stay?

Usually yes at this age, but confirm with the venue. Say clearly on the invitation whether parents are welcome to stay or can drop off, so nobody has to guess at the door.

What's a good time of day?

Late morning or early afternoon, after a meal and away from nap time, tends to work best.

Do I need an entertainer?

Not necessarily. A venue with built-in activities, or a few simple games, is often enough. If you book one, choose a short, interactive session designed for under-5s.

Do I need party bags?

They're optional. Keep them small and age-appropriate, or give a slice of cake and a small toy. Some venues include them, for example Chobham Adventure Farm.

Is it safe to give grapes and nuts at a party?

Cut small round foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes into quarters, and don't give whole nuts or popcorn to children under 5, as the NHS advises. Always supervise children while they eat.

SAY IT KINDLY

Save the date, invitation and RSVP wording

An invitation is a small promise that you'll look after someone's child. Make it easy to say yes.

1. Save the date (6-8 weeks before)

Save the date! [Child's name] is turning 4 and we're having a little birthday party.

Date: [day, date, month]
Time: [start - end]
Place: [venue or area]

Full invitation to follow. We hope you can come!
[Your name and number]

2. Invitation with the dietary question (4-6 weeks before)

You're invited! Come and celebrate [Child's name]'s 4th birthday with us.

Date: [day, date, month]
Time: [start - end]
Venue: [venue name and address]
Parking: [where to park]
Parents: [welcome to stay / drop-off is fine]

Food: please tell us about any allergies, dietary requirements or special needs, so we can look after every guest. Just reply with the details below.

RSVP by [date] to [your name, number or email].

We can't wait to see you!

3. RSVP reply for guests to copy and fill in

Child's name:
Parent / carer name and phone:
Coming? Yes / No
Adults staying:
Siblings coming:
Allergies (nuts, dairy, egg, gluten, sesame, other):
Dietary needs (vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, other):
Details, such as how severe and what to avoid:
Anything else we should know (shy, needs a quiet space, toilet help):

4. Reminder for anyone who hasn't replied (about 3 weeks before)

Hi [name], just checking whether [guest's name] can make [birthday boy's name]'s party on [date]. No pressure at all! Could you let me know by [date], and tell me about any allergies or dietary needs? Thank you!

Handling the replies

You're holding other families' information, so treat it with care.

- [ ] Keep a simple list of each child's allergies and dietary needs.
- [ ] Send it to the venue or caterer with your final numbers.
- [ ] Tell the party host about any serious allergy on the day.
- [ ] Use the information only to plan the party, and delete the list afterwards.

Sources

- NHS, Preparing food safely (Start for Life)
- HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics), Playful birthday party ideas and tips for young children
- St. Louis Children's Hospital, Why are latex balloons dangerous for children?
- Woking Leisure Centre, Children's parties and Inflatazone Exclusive party tickets
- Freedom Leisure, Woking Leisure Centre Prices 2025 (older price list, used only to note that the shared price differs)
- Chobham Adventure Farm, Parties
- Mazzy Bees Soft Play, Parties and home page

- Rugged Earth Adventures, Price list

Playtrail · Woking's party venue & entertainer finder · real local listings, no booking fees, no middleman.

© 2026 Playtrail. Made in Woking, for Woking.