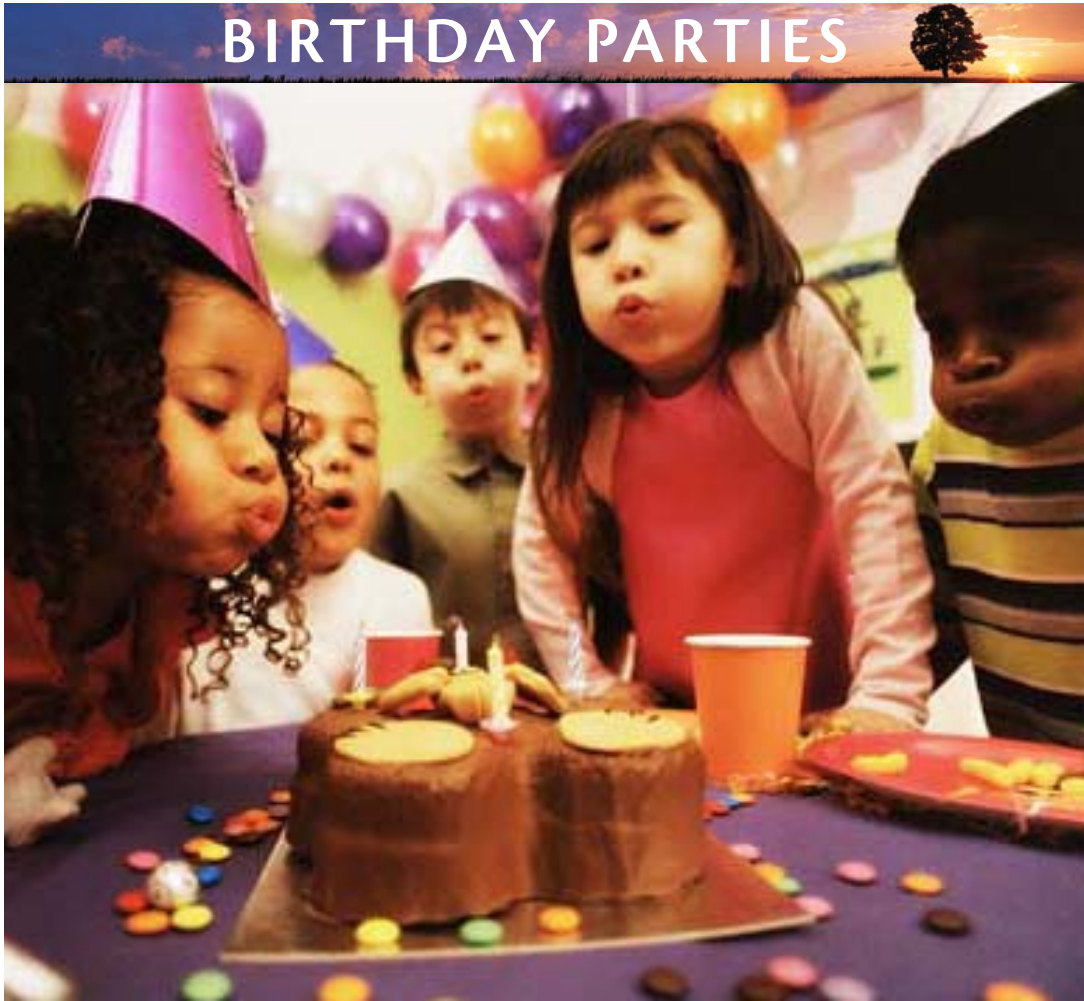


*A ScreamFree Guide to*

# BIRTHDAY PARTIES



A S C R E A M F R E E L I V I N G <sup>TM</sup> E B O O K

# A SCREAMFREE™ BIRTHDAY PARTY



Birthday parties, they're hallmark traditions of the American family. The circled day on the calendar comes with good stuff kids live for—the presents, the cake, oh, and the balloons—along with plenty you could live without—the invitations, the relatives, the slighted classmates, the duplicate gifts, the ungrateful child, the humiliated Mom, the exhausted children, the inevitable tears. It's all part and parcel of the Big Day, right? Well, what would you say if I were to tell you that your child's next birthday celebration has the potential to be a Scream Free event, all the way from planning the guest list to picking up the last scrap of wrapping paper? The thought is appealing, right? But, wait. There must be a catch, you say. Kids' screams—signaling delight and discontent—thrive on the commotion of a party. So perhaps you're thinking that I'm now going to recommend that parents not host big birthday hooplas for young children. Put the money into a college fund. Postpone the party until the kid is 21 and at last old enough to appreciate his parents' efforts.

You would be correct if you guessed that I am not an advocate of the extravagant affairs planned for many of today's tykes—the costly events which feel like super productions created by Willie Wonka *and* Santa Claus in cahoots. Though the out-of-control birthday event is an important subtopic, the ScreamFree concept applies to any children's party, large or small. And to set the record straight, I am more Oompah Loompah than Grinch when it comes down to it. I love birthday cake, balloons, goofy party hats and surprise packages as much as any kid. So I'm not suggesting that you toss that Party Warehouse coupon into the trash just yet. You can, in fact, have your cake and a Scream Free birthday party too!

## Happy Birthday to Me?

Let's begin by remembering the crucial principle in any ScreamFree Parenting endeavor. Parenting is about parents, not kids. This is shocking, but true! You must remember that you are the only person whom you can truly control. How your children feel and what they do with those feelings are not your responsibility. Your job is to concentrate on how *you* can handle each and every situation with integrity and composure.

Wait, you say, how can my focus be on me? Isn't this issue about the child? Aren't loving parents supposed to be unselfish? Isn't that why we center our lives around our children? We drop everything to be there for them. We orchestrate lovely parties for Cameron and Caroline, Jessica and Justin because we love them and want to express the joy and enrichment they give to our lives.

We want our precious babies to be happy and loved by other children, so we invite our kids' friends and our friends' kids, relatives and neighbors, best friends and bosses to partake in the memorable day. We want other moms and dads to witness our displays of affection. Others will agree that our offspring are wonderful because what parent would go to such lengths for a child who wasn't a treasure! And how could our amazing children be the way they are without such awesome parents!



**It's my party and I'll cry if I want to.**

— Lesley Gore

Hold up. Do you get the irony? Many parents are reluctant to see that most birthday parties really do focus on themselves, just not in the right way. Many of the things we do “for the sake of our children” are really more about us than we'd care to admit. Let me show you how focusing on yourself in an *unselfish* way actually leads to a party that is more about the child than the parent.

## What can we control?

Frankly, I've liberated myself from previous delusions of grandeur. It took some enlightenment, but I finally realized I am not the puppet master, the stage designer, or the script writer. But, I may have some impact as a director if I lead by example and treat the main characters with care, all the while realizing that the production is not mine alone. Wittingly or unwittingly, my kids will experience places, people and things I'd like to keep from them.

What can I control? Not much. I can check the forecast, but I cannot prevent a summer storm from canceling the swim

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party. I can give the kids vitamins, but I cannot prevent a virus from causing my daughter to throw up her cake and ice cream. Human beings are not all powerful. That realization actually removes my guilt when I see her sad face as the clouds break open. After all, it wasn't me who commanded the rain to come.

## **Whom can we control?**

Now let's consider who is *within* our control. Let's see. We can sign a contract with a clean cut young man who provides glowing references, but we cannot keep this magician from disappearing with our deposit. We can warn the disc jockey to play only approved music, but we should be prepared to step in when we hear the one song we specifically told him not to play blaring over the speakers. People are free spirits. They will do as they please. All people, even our children are free; they will also do as they please.

Oh, yes! The frightful reality is that we cannot control what our children feel or think or even what they do. A parent once said to me, "I most certainly can control my child! For two months I've been telling Emily, 'Emily, you have to earn at least a B in math if you want to have a movie party for your birthday.' And do you know what? Emily has an A in math."

These are my thoughts: Emily has an A in math because she decided to work hard enough to earn that grade. The movie party may have *motivated* Emily to master her multiplication tables, but she alone had to achieve the outcome. Could Emily have chosen to fail her math class? Certainly! But she chose not to. Mom had influence, not control. Emily is the one who took control. *The only human being you can control freely is yourself.* The clarity of that statement is shocking yet so simple in its truth.

## **The Gift of Self-Control**

We can control only ourselves. And guess what? Even though it may not be flashy, control over ourselves is the best birthday gift we can possibly give to our children. Taking control may sound easy, but it's a gigantic step. It requires maturity and a need to be mindful of our emotions and how they instinctively impact our actions.

You prepared your daughter's favorite: Grandma's chocolate cake with homemade frosting. You envisioned her delighted expression as her 13-year-old taste buds relished the delicious concoction. All day long you held that vision as you beat fresh eggs

and creamed real butter. Your arms tired and your feet ached by the time you finished, but it was your pleasure to sacrifice for your dear child.

What happens now is a blow to your angelic vision. Your daughter comes home in a huff and slams the kitchen door. She scowls at the sight of the cake and sighs, "Don't you know I'm on a diet! And I sure don't want chocolate crumbs stuck in my braces! Boys will be there!"

The temptation to shout back can be overwhelming. "How can you be so ungrateful? I spent all day in the kitchen just for you. I could have finished my report for work or planted the tomatoes, but instead I wasted four hours creaming butter by hand so my very own daughter could tell me how much she doesn't like the masterpiece I made for her! You don't appreciate anything!"

Have you guessed the likely outcome? An all out screaming match ensues in which both mother and daughter will say things they cannot easily forgive or forget. All over a chocolate cake that was supposed to transfer affection from one person to another.

A better way to handle the situation lies in the ScreamFree approach to living. This mother must pause. Sounds too simple? Well, it is that simple—in theory. Pausing in the midst of hurt and anger is one of the hardest things to do. But learning to separate our actions from our emotions is crucial to self-control.

When daughter arrogantly rolls her eyes at the cake, Mom will now feel like she's been pushed onto a rollercoaster. She certainly did not anticipate her daughter's reaction to the chocolate surprise. Here, Mom must *pause* and remember: the girl has her own mind. She is a free spirit. Though Mom gave birth to the girl, Mom cannot control what her offspring feels or does.

Rather than reacting, Mom can take a deep breath. If she needs to calm down, she can say, "We'll talk about this later" and leave the room. Putting some physical space between her daughter and herself does not mean that Mom should ignore the outburst. She should address the problem when both are calm enough to communicate. Separating and delaying a response gives the adult a

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**Having children makes  
you no more a parent  
than having a piano  
makes you a pianist.**

— Michael Levine

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chance to cool down in a moment of frustration to handle the situation responsibly.

Whether she chooses to respond right away or to establish a cooling off period, Mom can and should get to the bottom of her daughter's flare-up without letting emotions interfere. She may learn that her thirteen-year-old girl is sensitive about how she looks because she likes a certain boy. And Mom's calm will be powerful. Calm and control over any situation go hand in hand. She will not "lose it" with her daughter. In this example, by taking control the parent may then evoke a meaningful discussion and perhaps facilitate a fruitful exchange about self-confidence and body image. At that point, Mom could talk to her daughter about her own hurt feelings and appropriate ways of expression.

Reacting in the heat of the moment will always diminish a parent's *positive* influence over the outcome. Letting frustration or anxiety rule one's reaction, the adult relinquishes all control. Yelling back or retreating will impact how the child feels and what the child takes away from the experience, and that impression will be negative.

Again, the gift of self-control is the best gift parents can give to their children.

## Focusing on Y-O-U:

***Do NOT interpret this to mean that the party is for YOU!***

As we regard the importance of parental self-control and the value of separating oneself from one's child, we begin to see that the practice of focusing on oneself is not a selfish act at all. Comprehending the uniqueness within ourselves brings us to the realization that our children are also distinct individuals and not extensions of their parents. Their actions can and will trigger many of our emotions, but our responses can and should be the result of mature, rational thought. As we concentrate on ourselves and take responsibility for our own actions, we can focus on the ways in which we hope to influence and teach our children.

Again, the insight we must grasp is that we cannot control our kids.

So as we're making our initial stab at an honest self-assessment, let's ask ourselves what we hope to accomplish with this birthday bash. Should we confess that we are exhibiting to our friends and family that we are the adoring parents of an adorable child? Are we

trying to make our child popular with other kids by orchestrating the most elaborate affair on the block? Do we want our child to recall this occasion to his grandchildren and speak lovingly of his legendary parents?

## ***The boy cried at the carnival***

Speaking of legendary parents, I will relate a story about a birthday which will be recalled for all the wrong reasons.

Many of the children at my kids' school come from affluent families. While in preschool, my daughter was invited to a classmate's birthday party, which was held in a gated, stately neighborhood. Now don't get the wrong impression—I admire the work ethic that enabled that family and others to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle. I did not, however, admire the way in which the parents chose to celebrate their *toddler's* birthday.

Unfamiliar with the neighborhood, I drove slowly, somewhat hesitant, carefully following the directions. Soon, I realized that my worries about locating the right home were unfounded. As we approached the street, a fairytale carnival appeared before us with an entire village seemingly invited to this exclusive event. Parked quite a distance away, my daughter and I walked in silence as we approached the excitement. Balloons and carnival flags lined the entrance to an oversized tent, where clowns clowned, magicians made magic, and caterers catered—all to the joy of some and to the grief of the other key players.

Pony rides, a puppet show and a super slide completed the children's choices for fun. Quite a few adults, sipping margaritas or mimosas, laughed and relaxed on the lawn, seemingly oblivious to their offspring. Some parents supervised their children's fun, but a bulk of the kids ran amuck. The children, all 39 of them, were overwhelmed and out of control. When the time came to break open the piñata, the line was so long that the children at the end didn't even know what they were waiting for.

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**As we concentrate on ourselves and take responsibility for our own actions, we can focus on the ways in which we hope to influence our children.**

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The display of food could have fed an army, which was approximately the size of the crowd. The cake, a replica of a carnival tent with sugared animals and edible acrobats, would have just barely fit on my daughter's twin bed. My daughter, who was too dazzled to take it all in, chose to ride a pony then wanted to go home.

Leaving her gift for the birthday tot on a massive table of presents, my daughter spotted her friend, the man of honor. "There's

Jeremy!" she announced. The brightest smile my daughter had worn since we'd arrived evaporated when she realized the condition of Jeremy. The red-faced three-year-old was sniffing the way children do after a hard cry, and every time he tried to suck his thumb, his mother, frazzled but glowing in her flirty summer dress, pulled his hand away and said, "Why are you crying? If I were your age, I'd be riding a pony and having

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**In the final analysis  
it is not what you do  
for your children  
but what you have  
taught them to do  
for themselves that will  
make them successful  
human beings.**

— Ann Landers

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fun with my friends. We got everything a three year old could possibly want!"

My objection to the party was not its abundance but its absurdity. That such an affair was given in honor of a *three-year-old* was ridiculous. That little boy would have been thrilled to have invited two good pals over to eat cupcakes and play in the sandbox. Instead, the parents threw an extravaganza to meet their own expectations, not their son's. Additionally, despite all the time and money devoted to the party, the child was clearly unhappy. His displeasure was neither his fault nor a reflection upon his mother (other than indicating her misplaced priorities). But Mom was poignantly agitated that her child would rather suck his thumb than have fun.

Do you think this mother considered how her three-year-old son would have wanted to celebrate his milestone? Who, then, was she trying to please?

## ***I almost died in a purple suit!***

While that over-the-big-top experience is hardly the normal birthday party, the essence of what occurred is fairly common. For whatever reason, parents aim for extravagance when all their children really want are their parents' love, respect and guidance.

When our son turned two, we broke the one-child-per-age-of-child rule and invited ten children to his party. Disappearing then reappearing on the scene wearing a rented Barney costume was my bright idea and nearly my demise—the temperature inside that costume must have been 150°F! I quickly realized I had poorly planned the party that I *really* wanted to host rather than one my child would *really* love.

At two, my son was not thrilled to have so many kids around. He was used to playing with one other little boy at a time. And though he adored the purple dinosaur far away in television land, he was not at all keen with the reality of seeing that character live and in person in the front yard. No matter how much I tried to entice my tyke, he wouldn't go near me as long as I was Barney. What a headache! Though my son's party didn't approach the carnival calamity in proportion, it was, however, overblown. That party was my overblown notion of what I thought my son *should* have wanted.

## **Core Values do not rise and fall with hemlines.**

Dreaming up a birthday bash that's over the top in design or dollars is not exclusively a parental wrong; kids often ask more than their parents can or want to allow. "Jason had his party at Splash and Crash, so why can't I?" "Allie's parents let her have a boy-girl sleepover, so why can't I?" "Clay got to invite the whole class, so why can't I?" "Everyone will think I'm a freak if I don't invite boys!"

Societal and peer influences consistently bombard our children and compel them to fit in. Admittedly, we encourage our kids to fit in from the time they are tiny. "Go play on the swings with the nice little boy." Sure, we want our kids to have friends—the "right" friends, at least! And willingly or not, as parents, we reinforce their social anxieties every time we flex to accommodate a trend.

So what happens when their ideal fantasy birthday party exceeds the budget and/or the boundaries of what we as parents

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feel to be acceptable? Do we give in so that our children save face with their friends? Or do we hold fast to our system of standards?

Again, an inwardly focused stance removes all doubt. Core values are the beliefs we hold dear. They do not and should not change like seasonal fashions. We parents have the responsibility not only to teach but to uphold our standards for acceptable

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**The more your values  
guide your decisions,  
the more centered  
and more confident  
your children will  
be as adults.**

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behavior. Does that mean our kids will always listen? Of course, they won't. Remember, we cannot control our children. But, with calm resolve, we can do something much more lasting. We can influence them.

We are tremendously responsible *to* our children. If we do not teach them values, who will?

Will it be the sitcom writers? Or perhaps we should leave the teachings to the latest rudely defiant "musician". Maybe another kid's father, the one who never bothers about a curfew, will step in. We teach our children values by setting standards. When they cross the lines, kids should face the consequences—no television, no driver's license, no party. We establish the rules. If we are not supporting our own beliefs by guiding our kids in denying what is immoral or unaffordable or simply unappealing, we are not parenting.

If you've been wishy-washy in the past, you'll probably have to dig deeper to hold fast to your decisions. Be clear, be firm, but don't scream. Kids get the message if we speak calmly and remain consistent with our core values in place. "No, we do not believe in boy-girl sleepovers, and you may not have one even though Allie can." In teaching your kids your beliefs of right and wrong, you will raise happier, healthier children. Children want and need ground rules, even if they test us and act as if they want to fly with the wind. The more your values guide your decisions, the more centered and more confident your children will be as adults.

## **Actions speak; words shriek!**

In teaching values, words alone are not sufficient. Our kids will relate our actions to their lives more than our words. The old adage, "Children learn what they live," applies.

So let's check out the action at another party, the Scream Free birthday party.

Meredith has asked to invite the girls on her cheerleading squad to her birthday party. The total, counting Meredith, will be ten, and since she's turning ten, her parents agree to the guest list. But Meredith has decided that she does not want to include the new girl. Katie joined the squad last month, while the other girls have been together since last year. Meanwhile, Katie will definitely hear about the party plans, if she hasn't already.

Mom and Dad calmly and simply tell Meredith that if she wants to have a party with her fellow cheerleaders, she'll have to include Katie. If she refuses to invite her new teammate, she will not be having a party at all. They point out that though Katie and Meredith aren't close now, Katie is the type of girl who could become a great friend. Maybe Meredith could invite Katie over prior to the party so they can get to know one another better before the big event. Parents and child could also talk about how it feels to be the only one left out of a group. Guiding their cheerleader across this hurdle could result in the parents teaching an invaluable life lesson.

But how does the discussion become more difficult if Mom and Dad invite everyone but Aunt Mary's family to Thanksgiving each year because they don't care for her annoying table manners? And let's mention last weekend's cookout with the neighbors. The family next door wasn't asked because they aren't all that friendly. As parents, we have to lead by example. Otherwise, our words don't mean anything. We may as well speak gibberish to a stump in the woods if we walk one way and talk another because our kids won't take us seriously. However, if we've done the same things we're telling our children not to do, we can take responsibility and offer a resolution.

And you can bet that Meredith will notice. "Well, you didn't invite the Smiths to the cookout. That wasn't right."

"You know what? You're right, Meredith, we did not do the right thing. We should not have assumed the family wouldn't want to join the cookout. We're all making chili this weekend, so let's definitely include the Smiths."

Sounds too easy? You might be right. Meredith could bellow that no way is she going to invite Katie. Katie has bad breath. Katie kicked her yesterday in practice. ("See the bruise?") But don't scream back. Don't avoid the issue either. If Meredith stands firm and refuses to invite Katie, her parents should stick to their original decision: no sleepover. When the night comes with Meredith

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upstairs in her room all lonely and sad, Mom and Dad shouldn't feel one sliver of guilt. More pizza for them! After all, Mom and Dad didn't cancel the party; Meredith did by her own choice. Possibly she wanted to test her parents. Maybe Katie really does have bad breath. Either way, Mom and Dad stick to their values, and Meredith learns that her parents mean what they say.

Truth be told, that's not a bad birthday present either.

Meanwhile, Mom will be sure to invite the Smiths to the neighborhood gathering when Meredith is in earshot, and Aunt Mary will be invited to share Thanksgiving with the rest of the family this year.

## We all scream for ice cream!

The challenge to design and deliver a Scream Free birthday may not be small, but the prize is huge. A Scream Free birthday guided by parental self-control is the best gift we can give our children and ourselves. Adults never need to scream to be heard. The calmer we communicate, the more focused we become, the more we commit to our core values, the more responsible and happier our children will become as adults. If your kids scream, let it be for ice cream and in that case, join in right along with them.

## Practical Tips for a ScreamFree Birthday Party

Here's our ironic disclaimer about ScreamFree not giving techniques, right before we give a bunch of techniques...

Before you skip ahead to the "nuts and bolts" of having a ScreamFree Birthday party, you're going to have to do a bit of work. You have been introduced to the ScreamFree way of living through the first section of this eBook. You now know that a key principle of any endeavor is to focus on yourself. You are the only person whom you can fully control. Your next step is to ask yourself three critical questions before you head out to Party Warehouse or Chuck E. Cheese's.

### 1. Who is this party for?

My child, of course! Well, not always. If people are honest, they will typically find the answer in one of three reasons, and each will impact the party in a different way.

- A. *The party is for my child.* I will plan an event that is age appropriate and beneficial for her. I won't worry about what other parents think and I won't try to make this party measure up to any arbitrary standards. If my daughter wants a princess party for the fourth year in a row, then so be it. Bring on the tiara!
- B. *The party is for the other children.* I will plan an event that includes all of my child's friends and acquaintances so that no one feels slighted. I will make sure we offer many activities for many different age groups so that no one feels bored. I will be sure to have goody bags stuffed with toys and candy so that everyone leaves feeling happy. I will have a cake that everyone will like. I'll just have to say no to my daughter's request for a strawberry cake with pink icing and explain to her that not everyone likes pink.
- C. *The party is for other adults.* I will plan an event that will impress my friends and neighbors with my creativity and care for my child. I will be sure that the theme is original and carried out to the last detail. I will impress my adult peers to prove my love for my child and my prowess as a mother.

No honest answer is wrong, as long as you remain truthful with yourself from the beginning to end. Being honest with yourself about *who the party is for* frees you to plan, prepare, participate and put everything away until next year without resentment. Everyone, including the one-year-old who could care less what day it is or how many photos you take as long as he can continue putting fistfuls of cake into his mouth, can have a good time. If you get to the heart of the matter, the real purpose of the party, your efforts and your expectations become more realistic.

### 2. What if your child has a horrible time?

This is another fun question with a reasonably high probability of outcome. No one, not even the practiced guidelines you're reading and hopefully plan to follow, can guarantee that your child will have the party of his life. Unforeseen circumstances happen. That's life. You plan a summer party when most of your child's friends are out of town. Your tot is allergic to the pony. A thunderstorm washes out a swim party. The list goes on. What we can do? We can learn to accept that some things may go wrong. We can also anticipate potential problems and make contingency plans ahead of time just in case. If not many friends can attend, we can reschedule the date or do something extra exciting with one or two pals. ScreamFree living is not about ensuring happiness and peace all around you. Life has no guarantees. ScreamFree living is the free-

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dom to handle any situation with integrity, grace, and an unwavering sense of calm.

So, what will you do if your child has an awful birthday party? If you've prepared the most you could to make it ScreamFree, then you can simply be there with him in his misery without resenting the heck out of him. Heading into the party realizing that the only one you can control is yourself will get you off to a good start. If you spend hours carving a Power Ranger ice sculpture, be sure that you're doing it because you want to do it. If Timmy cries when starts to melt, be calm, give him a kiss, and move on. Participating in his meltdown will be giving a small child too much power over your emotions. And you'll also look mighty ridiculous in the process.

So be honest about your motivations and make the most of a special day by feeling joyful and remaining flexible!

### 3. How do you want to feel when it's all over?

This may seem like a strange question. Nevertheless, your answer is important. Do you want to feel frazzled and frustrated? Then, by all means, plan for frazzled. Invite too many people. Spend too much money. Hang on your child's every facial expression to see if you've created a special memory.

Do you want to feel resentful? Then spend too much effort on things you don't care about with the hopes that other people will notice them and praise your efforts. Bake that four-tiered castle cake even though your back has been bothering you and standing on the hard kitchen floor will make it ache for days. Afterwards, you can stand around waiting for others to compliment you.

Do you want to feel happy? Then include your child in the planning, keep your principles in tact, and expend the effort that you want to. Do you love to decorate? Then fill the house with balloons and streamers to feel more festive. Will it matter if no one notices how beautifully you coordinated the decorations with the child's party attire? No, not if you're taking your own pleasure in your surroundings and the fun and the celebration intended for you child. Base your happiness what is meaningful, not on their *oohs* and *aahs* over your streamers.

Now that you've thought about the foundational questions of hosting a ScreamFree Birthday party, you're ready for a few practical strategies to make the day successful.

1. **Plan** ahead. Though this sounds elementary, its importance is crucial.

∑ Sit down well before the event and brainstorm. What are your values about parties? What desirable and dreadful observations have you made at other parties? What made the situation good or bad? Ask your child about parties they remember. You might be surprised by their responses.

∑ Using your notes, talk to your child about what they would like. Some families love big parties. The problems start when children begin to expect something bigger and better every year. That is human nature. One solution to the bigger and better syndrome may be to alternate years for the big party. On odd numbered birthdays, your child gets the value-sized package, complete with clowns and magicians. On even numbered years, celebrate with a family dinner, cake, and a trip to the movies with a couple of his friends. Make the less extravagant day equally as special by with attention and love. Also, build up anticipation for the smaller event as well as for the larger bash. Anticipation often fuels the fun and can be the best part of the celebration.

∑ Send the invites. A good rule of thumb for determining an age-appropriate number of guests is to invite one more child than the age of the birthday boy or girl. I know, for some of you, this seems impossible. Trust me: the manageable number makes for much better parties. How many times have you seen the birthday child so overwhelmed with games, activities, presents, and kids that he didn't notice that his friend, your child, came in the first place? Do you want to teach your child that gifts and goodies galore are more important than good friends?

∑ Prepare as much ahead of time as you can so that you can be more relaxed the day of the party. Don't shy away from store bought cakes or decorations. They don't mean that you are uncarving and lazy. Decide what your priorities are and match them with your strengths. My kids learned long ago that mommy's cakes are like bricks with paint on them. To them, store bought is a treat, not a cop out. If you're planning games or crafts, organize all of your materials. Nothing is worse than trying to play Pin the Tail on the Donkey with scotch tape instead of tacks. Pre-cut craft materials and place everything in individual baggies for each kid so there is less chaos and cooperative fun.

∑ Hire a teenager to help with the logistics. Teens are typically great with kids and help you save your energy for big jobs, like cleaning up the grape juice stain on your new carpet.

∑ Don't serve grape juice when you've just put in new carpet if having it ruined would upset you. Seriously, ask yourself what would drive you nuts *before* the kids ever arrive. If you are a neat

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freak and the mere thought of ten sets of grubby hands on your couch sets you off, consider having your party away from home. If you know that loud noises and a frenzy of activity makes your hair stand on end, then don't go to an arcade or Chuck E. Cheese's.

## 2. Keep Things in **Perspective**.

Remember what it was like to be a child and plan the party from a childlike perspective. Theme parties are wonderful, but they can often take on a life of their own. Will your son really notice and appreciate the fact that the party napkins have the same design as the decorations on his cake? I once attended a "Bug" party for my daughter's three-year-old friend. They had bug cupcakes, bug table linens, a bug hunt craft table, bug shaped chicken nuggets, and bug shaped balloons. At the end of the party, I talked to the birthday boy and my daughter. I asked them what they thought of all the cool bug stuff at the party. They both looked at me with utter confusion. "I liked the sandbox toys," responded my daughter. "I got a Spider Man glove," said the birthday boy with a grin. So, ask yourself, what would your little one care about most? What would make his party special for *him*? Kids are not nearly as complicated as we think they are. They love attention above all else. Make your child feel like a king or queen for a day and invite a few friends to do the same. The love and attention is what your child will remember, especially if you refrain from placing him on a pedestal the other 364 days a year.

Kids, along with their interests, change like the weather. Keep this in mind! If your daughter likes Barbie dolls today and you buy everything from Barbie balloons to Barbie birthday buttons one month in advance, you're taking a big risk. One solution is to allow your child (especially as they enter the "tween" years) to drive the party planning. My neighbor seems to have a knack for this very thing. About a month before the party, she and her 11-year-old daughter sit down and begin to dream about the upcoming bash. At this stage, nothing is off limits. Offering encouragement, she lets her daughter come up with ideas and themes, and maintains a bit of distance in the process. Now, if Megan creates an elaborate theme, it is hers, not her mother's. Last year, they had a karaoke party. Megan thought up the idea, made her own invitations, went online for craft ideas, and had a blast doing everything. She owned it. Mom helped her pull it all together, but it was Megan directing the action. That kind of plan offers a good start to a ScreamFree Birthday.

## 3. Learn the power of **Pause**.

No matter how well you plan ahead and keep your perspective, realize that anything can go awry. Learning to take a few deep breaths in the midst of a storm opens a world of opportunities for you to grow and, in the process, teach your children invaluable lessons. Instead of becoming reactive and hastily assuming the worst when problems arise, pause for just a moment. Creating a pause unlocks your creativity and allows you to be regarded as your family's steady resource in the midst of trying circumstances.

# ScreamFree™ Parent Training

A Live Seminar on 4 CDs



You're a concerned and involved parent. You want your kids to grow up to be decent, honest adults. Now you can have help on the journey with one of the most valuable parenting tools ever produced.

The ScreamFree Parent Training Audio Series by Hal Edward Runkel, America's newest relationship expert, is now available. This series is a high-quality digital audio recording of a live seminar held in the Atlanta area. In attendance were real parents like you, seeking to revolutionize their family lives by learning the power of calming down. Interactive, informative, and entertaining, Hal will lead you to take the focus off your kids and place it squarely on yourself, leaving you with real strategies you can use to calm yourself and connect with your kids in an influential way.

Start your family revolution . . . tonight!

# SCREAMFREE™ RELATIONSHIP COACHING

Start a revolution in your life.

- Imagine relationships with your children led by your calmly chosen principles, even when your kids seem "out of control!"
- Imagine an adventurous marriage guided by your pursuit of intimacy, even if you and your spouse cannot seem to "meet each other's needs."
- Imagine work relationships directed by own self-respect and quest for success, even if your workplace seems filled with politics and stagnation.

**YOU CAN REVOLUTIONIZE** all your relationships, enhancing your life with your kids, your spouse, and your coworkers. All it takes is a willingness to become ScreamFree.™

Hal Edward Runkel, author, speaker, licensed family therapist, and visionary behind the ScreamFree approach to relationships, leads a team of coaches helping people all over the planet revolutionize their lives.

Don't hesitate to contact a ScreamFree Coach today. Your own ScreamFree revolution is waiting to begin. Contact us confidentially at [coaching@screamfree.com](mailto:coaching@screamfree.com) or 1-800-760-0771 for a free 20-minute consultation.

The relationships you've always wanted are within your reach. Start a revolution in your life today.

## Coming Soon From the SCREAMFREE™ LIVING SERIES



### ScreamFree™ Marriage: Calming Down, Growing Up, and Getting Closer

Combining timeless principles with the foremost clinical research, ScreamFree Marriage is not about "fighting fair," or "meeting one another's needs," or "becoming more compatible." No, a ScreamFree marriage begins with individual self-respect and personal responsibility. Celebrating your own personal growth is the key to intimacy. *ScreamFree Marriage* embraces the differences between you and your

spouse as the foundation for a great marriage. By learning to calm your own anxiety about those differences, you learn to pursue the intimacy you really crave. *Coming February 2006*

### ScreamFree™ Leadership: *Becoming the Calming Authority Your Organization Needs*

How do leaders motivate people to motivate themselves? How can they leverage authority to create a system that heightens self-respect and engenders shared power? Hal Runkel shows how leaders can create substantial change by effectively managing themselves. *ScreamFree Leadership* shifts the focus to the leader's own emotional reactivity. By learning to keep calm, the ScreamFree leader learns to share both the power and the pressure of leadership, inviting others to discover their own investment in the organization's success. *Coming February 2007*



## SCREAMFREE™ SPEAKING SERIES

with author and visionary, Hal Edward Runkel, LMFT



Bring Hal Edward Runkel and his associates to speak to your company, church, or organization. His engaging style, sense of humor, and to-the-point storytelling all make for an unmatched experience for your audience.

A relationship coach, business and church consultant, speaker, and author, Hal Runkel is the visionary leader behind ScreamFree Living, Inc., the company that's calming the world, one relationship at a time.

Hal and other speakers are available to speak on a number of topics:

- The ScreamFree Living Series:
  - ScreamFree Parenting: Raising Your Kids by Keeping Your Cool*
  - ScreamFree Marriage: Calming Down, Growing Up, & Getting Closer*
  - ScreamFree Leadership: Becoming the Calming Authority Your World Needs*
- Navigating Organizational Change with Integrity
- ScreamFree Conflict: Coming to Resolution with Your Integrity Intact
- The Art of Motivation
- Family Business Dynamics

Contact ScreamFree Living right now and schedule Hal and others to bring a revolution to your organization.

*Providing the ScreamFree Parenting program to my employees was one of the most effective and meaningful things I have ever done. I strongly recommend it to business leaders who realize that their employees are their most important corporate asset."* Ken Shumard, Chairman, Medical Doctors Associates

# THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF SCREAMFREE™ PARENTING

1. Parenting is not about kids, it's about parents
2. Growing up is hard to do, especially for grownups
3. If you're not under control, then you cannot be in charge
4. Keeping your cool means creating space
5. Begin with the end in mind, but let go of the final results
6. Kids need their room
7. Resistance is futile
8. You are not a prophet (and neither is grandma)
9. Keeping your cool means creating a place
10. Parents set the table by setting the tone (and vice-versa)
11. Let the consequences do the screaming
12. Empty threats are really broken promises (and other truths about consequences)
13. Put on your own oxygen mask first



SCREAMFREE LIVING  
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## ATTEND A SCREAMFREE™ LIVE EVENT SOON!

Hal Runkel, author and creator of the revolutionary ScreamFree Living Series, along with his team of ScreamFree Living associates, presents live events in companies, churches, community centers, and schools throughout the US. Visit the web site at [www.screamfree.com](http://www.screamfree.com) to learn about events near you, or if you don't see one in your location, contact us at [events@screamfree.com](mailto:events@screamfree.com) to schedule an event at your organization.

*We currently offer events and seminars in the following focus areas:*

**ScreamFree Parenting.** Our flagship book and seminar series is revolutionizing the way parents respond to and relate with their kids. ScreamFree Parenting creates parents who are calm, cool, and *connected* with their kids. Attend one of our events and experience what parents are calling "a genuine, life-changing event."

**ScreamFree Marriage.** ScreamFree Marriage presents a refreshingly new understanding of your most intimate relationship, inspiring you to calm down, grow up and get closer to your spouse. Build a mature and profound love based on your own self respect and individual responsibility. You'll actually celebrate your differences as a foundation for a fulfilling and intimate relationship.

**ScreamFree Leadership.** ScreamFree Leadership inspires individuals, teams and organizations to operate at the peak of efficiency, productivity, and passion. By developing in each team member a profound understanding of how relationship systems really work, ScreamFree Leadership enables each individual to take hold of his/her own emotional reactivity and truly become the calming authority every organization needs.

Custom seminar available at your location

*"Our company is nothing without our employees – I do everything in my power to make sure they are productive, happy, and healthy. I try to offer a good health plan, as well as family leave, vacation, and professional development opportunities. I love to celebrate holidays with gifts and rewards. But providing the ScreamFree Parenting program to my employees was one of the most effective and meaningful things I have ever done. I strongly recommend it to business leaders who realize that their employees are the most important corporate asset they have."*

Ken Shumard, Chairman, Medical Doctors Associates

## Put ScreamFree™ Parenting into Practice!

### FREE eBooks

Are you ready to continue the ScreamFree Parenting journey? Select one or more of the following FREE eBook titles that apply the valuable and proven ScreamFree Principles to some common parenting challenges:

- *ScreamFree Birthday Parties*
- *ScreamFree First Day of School*
- *ScreamFree Summer Vacation*
- *ScreamFree Holidays*
- *ScreamFree College Search*



Send an email to [ebooks@screamfree.com](mailto:ebooks@screamfree.com), and we'll send you a link to a page containing these valuable FREE ebooks. Indicate which ones you're interested in. If you would like a hard copy, send \$6.95 for shipping and handling and \$1.00 for each eBook to: ScreamFree Living Free eBooks, 1180 Satellite Blvd, Suite 300, Duluth, GA 30097. Include your postal address, phone number, email address and/or fax number.

### FREE eNEWSLETTER & ONLINE PARENTING FORUM



More practical ScreamFree Parenting stories, tips, and news FREE! Help your parenting journey with a free newsletter from ScreamFree Living. To register, go to [www.screamfree.com](http://www.screamfree.com) or email [newsletter@screamfree.com](mailto:newsletter@screamfree.com).

Our web site also offers other products including books, audio programs, and a free **ScreamFree Community Forum** where you can share your parenting stories and questions, and learn from other parents who are on the ScreamFree journey.