



BLOCK PARTIES

Planning for Success

Longer days and warm summer weather mean it is a perfect time for your neighborhood to throw a block party. Block parties are a wonderful way for neighbors to socialize and help to promote neighborhood security and a sense of community. Throwing a great block party is easy with some planning and teamwork.

It's All in the Planning

Planning your block party is essential. Your best bet is to involve neighbors to help. This will help share the load and can encourage more involvement. Four to six weeks prior to your event, invite a few neighbors over for a planning meeting and decide how to share duties.

You will need to decide on the date, time, and location. Block parties work well on a cul-de-sac or quiet street, but nearby parks, or a school property can be a great alternative.

Most towns or city governments require permits if you are going to block off traffic. Call your local law enforcement agency to inquire about what you need in your area. If using an alternate location, make sure you allow enough time to ask for permission for usage or to reserve space in a local park.

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IS SELF-CARE RIGHT FOR YOUR FAMILY?

The term *self-care* is sometimes used to describe children of upper-elementary and middle-school age who are responsible for their own safety and well-being when outside of school or other direct adult supervision. This can also include children who are in the care of another child under the age of 14 years. The impact of self-care on a child varies from child to child. Age, maturity, attitude, safety of the home and neighborhood, and the structure of self-care all influence the effects on a child.

First, be sure the child welfare guidelines of your state or county allow self-care by contacting your local Child Protective Services agency. You will find that most counties recommend time limits for leaving children of specific ages home alone.

You, as a parent, play a major role in making self-care a success by your attitude and how well you communicate with your child. Do you:

- Have a positive attitude about going to work?
- Have a positive relationship between you and your child?
- Have open lines of communication?
- Have a psychologically close and trusting relationship?

AM I READY FOR SELF-CARE?

Making the conscious decision to use self-care rather than “letting” it happen or being talked into it by your child will help set the groundwork for a more successful experience. Both you and your child must first be ready for self-care. Keep in mind that your child will respond to your emotions about self-care, whether you are confident or fearful. First ask yourself, “Am I comfortable leaving my child alone?” If the answer is *no*, do you have:

- Concerns about safety?
- Concerns about the readiness of your child?
- Concerns about being overprotective?

Before choosing self-care, consider all other possibilities. Be creative when considering other solutions. Possible options may include

- Staying with another member of the family
- Using part-time child care
- Participating in summer programs
- Hiring a college student to care for your child
- Trading care with friends and neighbors

You know your environment and your child best. Trust your instincts. Only you can decide what is best for your child.

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LEARN TO DISCONNECT

“Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide.”

—Marcus Tullius Cicero

Sage advice when it comes to technology, screen time, and multitasking. Continuously being connected without a break can cause anxiety and may inhibit deep thought.

A study from the University of Michigan found that multitasking heavily can fatigue the brain, which causes it to lose the ability to focus. Your brain needs a rest from the multitasking.¹ Some recent imaging studies have found that major cross sections of the brain become surprisingly active during downtime.² Just as plugging in and logging on is a habit, so should be taking a break from it. If you are not accustomed to breaking the plugged-in habit, it may take some diligent practice and rewiring on your part. Here are some suggestions for making the break.

- Challenge yourself to the 20-20-20 rule. After 20 minutes of computer use, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.³
- Say no to multitasking and allow yourself to do one thing at a time. Read a magazine, talk on the phone, or walk

to a coworker’s cube to ask a question instead of instant messaging or e-mailing.

- Change your environment by going on vacation and making it technology free. It may result in a level of relaxation and free-flowing ideas that you never imagined possible.²
- Be a part of nature. Go where cell phones don’t work, where there is no Internet, or where it is forbidden. For example, visit the ocean or a cave in the mountains or take a class.
- Start slowly. Create time each day, say 30 to 60 minutes, for no interruptions. For example, turn off technology an hour before bed or right before working out; try driving to work with no radio and no cell phone.
- Include the whole family. Limit children’s time on technology. Declare a TV Turnoff Week, with small prizes for contestants at the end of each day and the week.
- Practice mapping a destination instead of using the GPS.
- Go for a walk or jog without headphones; engage another person to go with you.
- Turn off notifications so you are not tempted to plug in.⁴
- Set aside time for social networking.⁴
- Move apps away from your home screen to avoid constant interruptions.⁴

Feel the freedom of *single tasking*. This means being comfortable working on one thing at a time, which helps sharpen focus and produce a higher quality uninterrupted output. Balance is the key. While it is vitally important to be plugged in sometimes, it is equally important to recognize that there is a world beyond the screens surrounding you.

References: Richtel, M. (2010, August 15). *Outdoors and out of reach, studying the brain*. *New York Times*. Retrieved November 13, 2014, from <http://www.nytimes.com/>. National Public Radio. (2010, August 24). *Digital overload: Your brain on gadgets*. *Fresh Air*. Retrieved November 11, 2014, from <http://www.npr.org/>. Goudreau, J. (2010, June 21). *Do computers really fry your brain?* *Forbes*. Retrieved November 11, 2014, from <http://www.forbes.com/>. Lepi, K. (2014, April 14). *Why you should unplug*. Retrieved November 11, 2014, from <http://www.edudemic.com/>.

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IS MY CHILD READY FOR SELF-CARE?

There is no magic age at which a child is ready for self-care. There are signs of readiness that you need to consider. The first question a parent needs to ask is, "At what age is it safe for me to leave my child home alone?" Consult your county social services agency or local police department for information on your community's local guidelines.

Age alone is not the best indicator. Look at your child's ability for self-care through the following factors:

1. Physical Maturity

- Can your child care for a pet if needed?
- Can your child get ready for school without supervision?

2. Cognitive Maturity

Children may not be able to think logically in an unexpected situation. Problem-solving may be difficult for them. Consider the following questions:

- Can your child answer the phone in a way that does not indicate that he or she is home alone?
- Does your child know to look before answering the front door? Under what circumstances is it safe to open the door?
- Can your child understand your written directions and follow them accordingly?
- Does your child have an accurate concept of time to schedule activities throughout the day?
- Does your child use safe judgment when faced with a problem-solving situation?
- Can your child understand an emergency and when help is needed?

3. Emotional Maturity

Your child may be "big" enough physically and "bright" enough cognitively, but may not be able to emotionally handle being alone. Some questions to ask include the following:

- Is your child confident?
- Does your child have a lot of fears?

- Is your child stressed in uncomfortable or new situations?
- Is your child capable of solving problems that might arise during the day?
- Is your child able to remain calm and handle fear, loneliness, and boredom?

4. Social Maturity

The final item to consider is how well your child handles social situations. Some questions to ask include the following:

- Does your child solve sibling conflicts with little help from adults?
- Does your child talk easily to you about events and feelings?
- Is your child confident in contacting an adult if there is a problem?
- Does your child choose friends that influence positive behaviors?

No matter what your child's age or ability, it is important for everyone to feel confident with the self-care decision. You may want to test your child's skills in the above areas by asking questions and practicing role play with your family. Have an adult friend that your child won't recognize call or stop by the house. Observe the reaction from your child. What information does your child give out? Does your child make it obvious that he or she is home alone? Talking about the appropriate responses is the best way for your child to learn what will be expected of him or her.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2014). *Is self-care right for your family?* Raleigh, NC: Author.



SUMMER SAFETY FOR PETS

Pets are vulnerable to high temperatures, especially during a heat wave, and are unable to cool down their bodies as humans can. Animals left outside in high heat temperatures can suffer from heat-related stress, burned paws, sunburn, and even death. Pet owners are advised to follow these simple hot weather tips to keep their pets healthy, safe, and alive.

- Make sure pets have plenty of fresh clean water every day and that the water container is stable to avoid tipping over. If traveling or leaving home with a pet, always carry sufficient drinking water for it.
- Bring pets inside during the hot time of the day and let them rest in a cool part of the house.
- Make sure pets have plenty of shade if they are to be kept outside. Remember, the shade your pets have in the morning will either change or diminish throughout the day and may not protect them.
- Never leave pets in a parked vehicle. Even in the shade with windows cracked, temperatures inside can quickly reach a dangerous 120 degrees and that can kill any animal!
- Don't force animals to exercise when it is hot and humid. Exercise pets early in the morning or late in the evening.
- In hot weather, do not let pets stand on sidewalks or hot asphalt to avoid burning their paws.
- Pets can get sunburned too! Keep pets out of the sun during peak hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Put sunscreen on pet's unprotected areas such as tips of noses and ear tips, especially on short haired fair-colored pets.

Remember pets can suffer heat-related stress and danger just as humans can, so take extra precautions and protect them.

Adapted from Heat safety tips for pet owners. San Bernardino County, CA. Retrieved January 2015.
<http://www.sbcounty.gov/uploads/dph/acc/content/Heat-Safety-Tips-for-Pet-Owners.pdf>

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Get the Word Out

The easiest way to get people to your party is to distribute flyers to each home. Make sure to provide contact names, numbers, and email addresses to keep track of who is coming and to sign up for potlucks, coordinate activities, or provide necessary items such as chairs, tables, coolers, or lighting. Consider creating a page on a social networking site, such as Facebook, for your neighbors to find out the latest information on your event. A reminder right before the event is always a great idea.

Chow Down

Food is of course an important part of any block party, and there are a variety of ways to feed the crowd. Potlucks are a great way to get everyone involved and share the work. Neighbors can bring food from different categories such as entrées, salads, beverages, or desserts. You may want to arrange a barbecue and collect some funds to pay for it. You might even consider having all or part of the meal catered and charge guests a fee to cover costs. This doesn't have to be expensive. Hero sandwiches or fried chicken from local markets can be your entrée. Don't forget napkins, plates, utensils, and coolers full of beverages.

Fun Activities

Planning activities that everyone can enjoy will help add to your block party fun. When possible, pick team activities to help neighbors get to know one another. You also want to make sure you plan activities that everyone can enjoy—kids and adults.

Older children can be involved in planning and monitoring activities for the younger kids. Traditional games such as tug of war, three-legged races, or a water balloon toss are fun for the whole family. Tables for art projects, such as finger painting or name tag decorating, can help to make keepsakes of the event and are fun for the young ones. Sidewalk chalk drawing can help everyone exhibit their artistic tendencies. You may even consider hosting a talent show or karaoke. If you are holding your event at a park or school, you can take advantage of sporting facilities. A neighborhood pool might also be a good place to start your block party fun.

Clean it Up

You won't want to get stuck with the cleanup chores following your block party, so make sure to include a way to share the duties in your planning. Ask neighbors to make their garbage cans available throughout the block and, if possible, hold your event close to garbage pick-up day. Ask that tables, chairs, and other equipment be removed at the end of your event.

Remember, a little careful planning can make your block party a breeze. Bring your neighborhood together and help create good memories for all.

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