

Kids' birthday parties are getting more expensive. Should guests help pay for them?

Tip requests are reportedly creeping onto invitations. When did the expectations for parties get so high?

Natalie Stechyson · CBC News · Posted: Jul 30, 2026



Guests attend a birthday party on July 23 in Baltimore. There's a debate raging online about whether guests should help pay for parties amid stories of some parents asking for cash tips. (Jemal Countess/Getty Images/Mr. Bubble)

Kids' birthday parties are a big business these days pretty much any way you go about it.

At best, there's the price of food, cake and balloons. Maybe you rented a bouncy castle to keep the kids entertained, or hired Elsa to sing *Let it Go*, or paid for the reptile zoo to come to you.

Perhaps, at worst, you booked a party package at the soft play/arcade/ball pit/laser tag/loud indoor theme park. Or maybe you're taking six pre-teens for manicures, or a dozen kids to make splatter art and friendship bracelets at your local pottery studio/craft shop/artisan sandwich cafe that — did you hear?! — just started booking birthday parties.

Big or small, the costs add up. But does this mean the hosts should ask other parents to help cover the expense?

That's the debate currently raging across the internet amid reports some parents are asking guests for tips. And we don't mean advice. We mean cash in a jar, a contribution, or paying to attend.

"Have you seen this on an invitation yet? I bet you will," a cake decorator said in a viral TikTok video last year. In the video, she claims at least three families she'd worked with included requests for tips on their party invitations to help cover costs.

"If you are inviting my children to your child's birthday and you asked me to pay for them to come, nine out of 10 times they're probably not going to be attending," a U.K. parent and financial advisor recently posted.

"I've seen it ... the mom invoiced people," a parenting podcaster said in a video posted in March.

In the comments online, most people argue you shouldn't be throwing a party you can't afford, while others defended the practice given costs for everything are skyrocketing.

But it also opened up a bigger conversation: when did the expectations for kid parties get so, well, bananas?

"When it's financially difficult for families to do this to the extent they have to ask other families to pitch in, we are really getting out of hand," Vanessa Lapointe, a parenting consultant based in Surrey, B.C., told CBC News.



An Instagram post from Kim Kardashian from May 14 shares details of her son's Pokemon birthday party. (@kimkardashian/Instagram)

'The pressure is real'

According to recent media reports, the average parent spends at least \$445 for a party, at least one in five parents spend more than \$700, and a third of parents go into debt for it. Event planners have described wealthy parents willing to spend upward of \$42,000 to throw extravagant parties for their children.

Other reports have suggested over two-thirds of parents polled think planning their kid's birthday party is more stressful than their day job. And nearly half of a thousand U.K. parents polled last year admitted they felt competition with other parents to throw the best party.

Meanwhile, parenting blogs and websites encourage "enchanted garden" party themes (complete with fairy doors and pixie dust) and advise that "farmcore" parties — in which the children churn their own butter — are trending. Elsewhere, celebrities like Kim Kardashian are posting photos of their children's bashes, including, in her case, a giant Pikachu.

"There's definitely a pressure to make sure your kid has a memorable party," Ottawa mom Gaelan Jaffray told CBC News.

"You're measuring yourself against what you're seeing on social media and what your friends are doing and you don't want to be the one with the lame party. The pressure is real and mostly self-inflicted."



Gaelan Jaffray's son opens a present at a dinosaur-themed party she hosted in Ottawa that she jokingly says was 'Pinterest-worthy.' (Gaelan Jaffray)

It's also incredibly expensive no matter which route you take, Jaffray says. She estimates parties for her son, 10-year-old Everett, average about \$400, and even hosting at home becomes pricey once you factor in food, cake, decorations, entertainment and loot bags.

For instance, five years ago, Jaffray threw Everett a dinosaur-themed party at home that she jokingly describes as "Pinterest-worthy." There was a balloon arch, a mural, custom cupcakes, a dinosaur bouncy castle and a loot bag for each guest.

"That said, I don't think the rising cost of hosting justifies asking invited guests to subsidize the party," Jaffray said.

"To me, bringing a gift is already the guest's contribution."

Warning over 'culture of comparison'

Expectations for modern parenting have become so all-consuming that researchers now have a term for it: the intensification of parenting.

Even the U.S. surgeon general has acknowledged these pressures, issuing a public health advisory in 2024 about the impact on parents' mental health. Part of modern parenting's unique struggles are what he called our "culture of comparison," propagated by influencers and online trends that create unrealistic expectations.

You know, like ombre balloon arches, professionally designed cakes and loot bags that could rival the swag bags at the Oscars.

"Comparison is the thief of joy," said Lapointe, the parenting consultant.

And it's not like the quality of a birthday party is going to make or break their childhood, she added. Kids will look back on the experience and how they felt, not how splashy it was.

Still, said Jaffray, as kids get older and start having specific requests, it's hard to say no.

"It's the only time they're going to turn that age," she said. "You want it to be special."