



# BACKYARD GAMES for kids' **BIRTHDAY PARTIES**

## ON THE DAY

### of a birthday party,

your child is likely to have trouble sitting still as she waits more or less patiently for the guests to arrive. As her friends show up one by one, the energy of the group builds and threatens to overwhelm you, the poor parent in charge of managing this excited maelstrom. At this point, you'd really like to see the attendees get out of the house for a bit. You've decorated the yard, purchased a new [swing set](#), and even done some long-delayed yard work in preparation. And then, disaster strikes; with no planned activities, you hear that dreaded phrase - "We're bored!"

**What's a parent to do? Well, you** can start by learning the rules for several great backyard party games. Getting the kids to play birthday games outdoors is kind of like hiding shredded zucchini in chocolate cake: it gets them moving in the fresh air and having a blast without the stigma of calling it "exercise."

**These games are designed to** be played by kids in the 3- to 12-year-old age range, but enjoyment of a particular activity will depend on the individual child; your kids will definitely let you

know whether a game you suggest is "cool enough" for them to play with their friends.

As with all outdoor activities, make sure that you follow proper safety precautions, such as clearing the play area of unnecessary items, checking that all equipment is in working order, and providing adult supervision. When kids run around, sometimes small scrapes and injuries can occur; it's a good idea to have a first aid kit on hand.



## IMAGINARY PLAY *(Pirate-Themed)*

### Equipment/Play Area

*Cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, whatever is available.*

*The main requirement for this game is having someone with a good imagination (possibly a parent or older child) to help “guide” the play.*

“Pirates” is an especially popular imaginary play game. You can use a play set as the “pirate ship,” and have the kids “sail off” to distant lands. Once they “arrive,” they can plunder goods - such as toys and party favors that you provide, along with cupcakes that look fit for the high seas. If you want to go all out, consider serving pirate-themed food - you’ll find plenty of ideas [here](#).

Props are always a bonus during imaginary play. Paper towel tubes make great telescopes, and it’s not hard to mock up some eye patches with a bit of fabric. Rigging some sheets on a stick or broom handle to

form a sail will really get the kids in a pirate-y mood. And all you need to create sweet pirate hats is a few sheets of newspaper (check out [this video](#)).

**Variation:** Get some large cardboard boxes and cut them into the rough shape of ships. Separate bands of pint-size pirates can battle each other using water balloons or ping-pong balls.



### Equipment/Play Area

*Items that can be used as safe zones*

You probably remember this classic game from your own childhood days. Lava is a great choice for an all-ages activity because it’s non-competitive and encourages cooperation and creativity.

For the playing field, you’ll want to have an area covered with grass, sand, or woodchips that is dotted

with rocks, play equipment, and other things for the players to stand on. You can use carpet tiles or foam rubber mats in addition or as a substitute to these safe zones.

**The rules are simple:** players are “out” if they touch the “lava,” or ground. Once a player is out, he can return to “home base” for a period of time before returning to the game. Or, he can go to a “hospital” area where he has to be tagged by another player before rejoining the game. Put some party balloons in the play area that kids can use as special “flotation devices” to rise about the lava (which means they can touch the ground while holding a balloon). Encourage cooperation by limiting the number of balloons, and having guests “fetch” each other from difficult spots.

**Variation:** If you want to make this game more competitive, you can use the term “water” instead of “lava.” The players are allowed to run around in the water as much as they want until the “shark” announces itself. The players then have to get onto “land” before being tagged. If they are tagged, they are out, or they turn into the shark.

YOU PROBABLY  
REMEMBER THIS  
CLASSIC GAME  
FROM YOUR OWN  
CHILDHOOD DAYS!



# Party Monster

## Equipment/Play Area

*Items or spaces that can be used as safe zones*

After learning this super-charged variation of tag, you may never play the regular version again. You'll want to have play equipment, fences, walls, or natural items (trees, rocks, etc.) in the play area to use as "bases." The play area can be as big or as small as you like. No matter how much space you have, you should be prepared for a lot of running.

**First off, determine the play area boundaries and bases.** The bases should be located throughout the play area; each base needs to be large enough for all players to touch it in some way. Next, one of the players is designated as the "party monster," also known as "it." The non-it players disperse to the bases, and the game begins.

### Game play is straightforward:

players move between the bases, trying not to get tagged. Once a person is tagged, she becomes "it." Having obstacles and hiding places makes the game more complex, and can turn it into a variation of hide-and-seek.

### This game can get competitive.

If you're playing with kids who have varying levels of athletic abilities, try to encourage more skilled players to "take it easy" on less skilled players.

**Variation: Tagged kids go to "jail,"** where they have to be tagged by a non-it person to rejoin the game. You can also have multiple "party monsters."

# Make sure that you follow proper safety precautions!

## Kids and Cake *(aka Wolves and Sheep or British Bulldogs)*

### Equipment/Play Area

*A contained area big enough to run around in*

**In order to play this game, you'll** want to have definite boundaries that players aren't allowed to cross; otherwise, it's too easy for people to escape getting tagged. Boundaries can be fences, walls, or terrain types (an area of grass, for example); alternately, use adults or objects to mark the field.

**One person is designated as the "kid;"** this person stands in the middle of the play area and yells "I'm going to eat all of the cake," after which the "cake slices" (other players) run across the playing field. The kid tries to grab as many of the cake slices as possible; each time, he holds onto the captured player and makes eating noises for a few seconds, such as "om-nomnom!" Pieces of cake freeze once

they are "eaten." When players reach the opposite side of the playing field, they are considered "safe" and can no longer be tagged.

**Now, all of the frozen people** become kids ("it") themselves. The play is repeated, with pieces of cake again running across the field and trying not to be tagged by the now larger number of kids. Play ends when all of the slices of cake have been eaten by the kids.

**Variation: Make a rule that the** taggers have to join hands and form a "snake." (This variation is also known as "human chain" or "blob tag.")



# Capture the Flag



## Equipment/Play Area

*A square play area, with or without obstacles*

**Capture the flag** has plenty of variations, but this is a faster version that you don't need a lot of space for.

**Start by marking a square-ish** field that has enough room for all of your players to comfortably run around in, perhaps 25 or 30 feet to a side. Divide the field down the middle to create two equal areas; divide the players into two teams. Each player gets a flag (a bow, a balloon, or a piece of crepe streamer, for example). These flags are lined up along the back of the playing field on each side.

**To play, players dash across the** line and try to grab the flags of the other team. Once they cross the line, they are free game to be tagged. A player can only grab one flag at a time. If the player gets tagged, she goes to a designated "jail" area; players in "jail" can only leave if tagged by someone on their team. If the player grabs a flag, she is safe and cannot be tagged until after returning to the other side with the goods.

**The first team to successfully get** all of the flags (or to successfully get everyone on the opposing team in jail) wins.

**Variation:** Players can still be tagged once they exit the jail, or while they have a flag.

# Birthday Scavenger Hunt

## Equipment/Play Area

*A play area with lots of hiding places. Several individual prizes, or one big one*

**Although setting up a good** scavenger hunt requires a little more effort than some of the other games on this list, the thrill of the chase is definitely worth it. What could be better than a bunch of children squealing with delight as they score great loot?

**For younger children, an** Easter-egg style scavenger hunt, in which many items are hidden in fairly easy-to-spot locations, is usually best. After all, they don't always understand the concept of sharing, and are more likely to play in a parallel manner than a

cooperative one. Additionally, they can lose interest if it takes too long to find their treats. Make sure the prizes are colorful; use plastic egg containers, or wrap items in bright shades of cellophane.

**A work-together "quest" style** hunt can be tons of fun for older children. To play this game, you first need to create a series of clues, each one leading to the next. Including toys or gifts for each person at each location will ensure that they don't give up. When you're ready to have the kids play, give them the first clue and set them loose. The final clue can lead to a specially decorated area or room, possibly the location of cake and presents.

**Variation: Include some** sort of physical or mental puzzle or challenge that the kids have to work together to solve before they get the next clue. You can use one of the above-mentioned games (Obstacle Course or Lava work well) or create your own.



**When kids run around, sometimes small scrapes and injuries can occur; it's a good idea to have a first aid kit on hand.**





## Streamer-Tied Obstacle Course

### Equipment/Play Area

*Play equipment, plastic cones, hula hoops, balance beams*

Everyone loves a good obstacle course, and it's a great activity to tailor to different ages and skill levels. Set up the course using whatever you have on hand - have kids crawl through a flexible play tunnel, jump through hula hoops, or slide down the slide before running to the next step.

Tying players together with crepe paper adds a fun party twist; however, it doesn't always work for younger children or children with a lot of energy. If you prefer, you can add a birthday theme by making a balloon pit full of blown-up balloons or by letting kids run through hanging crepe-paper streamers.

Find out more on making your own obstacle courses [here](#).

Found a backyard game that's right for your kid's next birthday party? Great!

Just remember to play fair, stay safe, and above all, have fun! ”

## Contact Us!

*If you have questions about a product, your swing set project or need any assistance placing an order, we're happy to help! Feel free to contact us by phone, email or fax.*

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