

Are we there yet?

Confessions from the frontline of parenthood



party pooper pride

As party season gets into full swing, Dubai mum of two Charlotte Butterfield explains why she's happy sitting on the sidelines

Birthday party. Two words that make mums across the globe shudder with thoughts of the effort, the expense, the e-numbers...

This year we made the controversial and, some might say, skinflintish decision of having a joint party for our son's and daughter's birthdays as they fall only a fortnight apart. They are turning one and three respectively and so we did it on the premise that there's only a limited number of years that we can get away with it. Imagine telling her on the cusp of her 17th that her 15-year-old brother would also be inviting his mates

round to share her shindig. Although my other half assures me Raphael's friends wouldn't protest too much...

Now, though, we have to work out what kind of party to hold. In Dubai, the opportunities for kids' parties are endless; we went to a birthday party recently where the three-year-old birthday girl sat on a throne while her minions (oops sorry, I mean friends) delivered presents to her feet. It's a tough enough job trying to convince a three year old that actually they are not "Crown Ruler of All They Survey", so when you present them with a tiara, sceptre and subordinates

bearing gifts, you have to also expect them to utter the words, "My birthday will be ruined if I don't have a piñata."

One of my friends recently went down the interesting route of hiring a petting zoo for her son's party; all was going well until the birthday boy threw a tortoise. Looks of horror at the flying shell turned to relief when we realised our own child wasn't the guilty bowler. The tortoise was fine by the way, if a bit questioning of his career choice.

I think back to the birthday parties of my own childhood, my whole class lying like sardines on our living room floor under the guise of playing Sleeping

Lions, while Mum and Dad had a drink and chortled at their ingenuity at keeping 24 kids still and silent for two hours. Those were happy days.

We also learnt a valuable lesson over the festive period concerning presents, as the only gift that seems to have had long-term appeal is a Dhs5 sticker book. The scooter is being used as a bookshelf, the doll's house a clothes rail, and poor Minnie Mouse has been consigned to life in a cupboard due to her "scary eyes".

Top of our little one's list for her birthday is a make-up set and ironing board, and I must admit a certain pride at her desire to fuse glamour and domesticity at such a young age, not to mention that both can be bought with green notes rather than red.

Don't get me wrong, I'm as guilty as the next person of throwing money at a situation when short of time or inspiration but, in reality, three year olds have very limited aspirations, "Oh lovely, a party, will there be sugar there? And possibly

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Expectations magnify with age until you reach a crescendo around your 21st birthday, and then decrease rapidly until denial sets in, "What? My birthday? No, no, no, you must be mistaken, I haven't had one of those since 1998." ❀