

## A Guy's Guide to At-Home Entertaining With Kids *We're able-bodied men. We got this.*

What's the most masculine role a man can take on? Lumberjack? Sea captain? EHH WRONG. Dinner party host. Now that's a gig that *really* takes cojones. If you're a parent, too, you get it: Just going to dinner and a movie post-kids is hard enough, but entertaining in your own home? The breeding ground of cheese cracker bits, spare toy parts, and smudgy fingerprints? *Without breaking a sweat?* That's what separates the men from the boys, the fathers from the dads.

It's not an easy gig, but if you want to retain some semblance of a social life, you're going to have to man up and do it eventually. Here's how.



Image credit: Imkid.com

**1) Invite the kids.** This is first and foremost, bud. “Adults only” is nice in theory, but in practice, someone’s feelings always get hurt. (“What do you have against our little Brentson?!?!”) Keep in mind, too, that this’ll prevent your friends, neighbors, podiatrist or whomever you’re inviting from playing the last-minute “we couldn’t find a sitter” card. (We’ve all done it.)

**2) Pick a date.** Choose a date that you think is reasonably far off in the future that people won't already have plans — then tack another month onto that. Because as you're already well aware, a parent's calendar is typically jam-packed, though not necessarily with things they want to be doing.

**3) Pick a time.** Ah, here's where it gets tricky: nailing down the ever-fleeting windows between naptimes, bedtimes and mealtimes. It's pretty much impossible, so just plan on starting the party earlier than you would have pre-rugrats — especially if some of your guests are arriving with infants and toddlers in tow. You could, for instance, begin at 6 p.m. to ensure the kids arrive hungry for dinner, and let your child-free guests know they can show up a little later.

**4) Let the kids do their thing.**

Don't expend unnecessary energy dreaming up activities to keep the kids busy. They'll lose interest after two minutes, anyway, and the new environment will be stimulation enough. Just set them loose in an adjacent room or the backyard and let them work out the pecking order (checking in every so often, of course).



Image credit: Martha Stewart

### 5) Keep it simple.

Even if your own brood was introduced to solids through water crackers and pate, you can assume that your guests' kids will arrive with persnickety palates. You could, of course, provide more highbrow snacks to tide the adults over until dinner, but keep the main event simple: a giant pot of spaghetti with your own secret-recipe marinara, a few boxes of take-out pizza and a big bowl of salad, brownies and cookies for dessert. See the theme here? These are all crowd-pleasers that your guests can serve themselves — no muss, no fuss, no reason for the host to also take on the role of waiter — which brings us to our last point...



Image credit: Laura Fuentes

### 6) Keep it casual.

Timed courses, place settings, and fine china needn't apply at a kid-friendly dinner, so resist the urge to release your inner Martha Stewart. Set up a buffet-style spread in the kitchen (or outside if the weather's nice), provide ample seating, give your guests the green light to beer and juice boxes in the fridge, and allow everyone more opportunity to do what they came to do: Spend time chatting with people old enough to vote. Hopefully you'll have inspired them to one day be brave enough to return the favor.

