

# 'TIS THE SEASON -

FOR

# GRADUATION PARTIES!

Tips for attending these special events

by: Julie Costakis, mom of 3

Ready to embark on a busy graduation party season?

As mailboxes begin to fill with open house invitations, you may be wondering about the current protocol surrounding this rite of passage. We asked local veteran party-goers for their advice on managing multiple invites, appropriate gift-giving and etiquette for co-parties.

Your first consideration may be deciding which open houses to attend. "Some years we receive loads of invitations," says Karen, mom of three. "But if we don't know the child well, we decline unless the parent is a close friend." Via social media or word of mouth, students tend to receive more invitations than parents do. Try purchasing a stack of graduation cards and writing personal notes in advance to avoid last minute scrambles.

"Gifts are the prerogative of the giver, not an entitlement of the graduate," offers Dave, father of two. "Most people bring an envelope with a check, cash or gift card, but some opt for



personal items." When the event is for two or more students, it is acceptable to bring a gift only for the one(s) you know. A recent graduate adds, "The fact that a guest took the time to celebrate my graduation meant more to me than what they brought or didn't bring. Of those gifts I did receive, checks and gift cards helped me to afford necessary college supplies." Typically students do not bring gifts for each other, as they would simply be passing money around amongst themselves. Another way to contribute in a meaningful way is to write sentiments on a photo mat or memory album page which are often displayed at parties.

If you have many graduates you know this year, multiple monetary gifts can quickly add up. Before invitations arrive, make a list of the students you are closest to. Determine how much you want to budget in total for graduation gifts and divide accordingly. "Parents attending numerous parties might consider a year of graduation" check - \$20.14," says Dave. The most common amounts of money recent graduates say they received were \$25, \$50 and \$75.

Also, keep in mind that giving monetary gifts may not be in all family budgets. Remember that graduation is a milestone, not a fundraising event. "A heartfelt note or memorable photo can make an impression, lasting long after money is spent," says Karen. "On invitations to my co-workers and my daughter's teachers, coaches and principals, I wrote 'Please, no gifts.' " This approach allows people attend, rather than forego a celebration due to unmanageable expenses for dozens of students every year. "No amount of money could outshine the meaningful notes my daughter received from her teachers," says Karen.

Some parents will opt for a party at home, while others rent more elaborate venues. "You may be surprised at the extravagance of some parties," says Dave. "Graduates have every reason to celebrate, yet like weddings, these events often go overboard." If you're invited to a blowout affair, focus on the graduate instead of worrying whether your own child's open house will measure up. Budgets and priorities differ for each family, and a wide range of party styles is perfectly acceptable.

If you have a friend whose graduation party is this year, consider offering to help out with the idea of reciprocation during your future open house. "I was too busy replenishing refreshments and handling unexpected issues to enjoy myself," Karen laments. "Lending a hand is a wonderful gift!"

Attending multiple open houses can inspire ideas for what your own future graduate might like. Take mental notes of what guests enjoyed and a few weeks after the event, ask hosts for their reflections on what they would do again or avoid. Then sit down with your child months ahead of graduation to discuss their personal preferences.

Graduation is an important mile marker for students - take time to celebrate with those closest to you. By putting an emphasis on what this momentous occasion truly means to graduates and their parents, instead of focusing on the "right" gift to give, you can help make this meaningful event even more special.

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