

Birthday parties

Listen to a conversation about birthday parties between three friends to practise and improve your listening skills.

Before listening

Do the preparation task first. Then listen to the audio and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. self-indulgent
2. to spring up
3. a hassle
4. to turn up
5. to shudder
6. retro
7. immature
8. a touchy subject

Definition

- a. something that is annoying because it causes difficulty or trouble
- b. to shake suddenly and briefly, especially in fear or disgust
- c. to appear unexpectedly
- d. allowing yourself to have or do anything you enjoy
- e. something that you have to talk about carefully as it can make people angry or unhappy
- f. to arrive or to come to something
- g. behaving in a way that seems too young for your age
- h. in the style of the past

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. Charles thinks a surprise party is ...
 - a. a chance to relax.
 - b. too much of a shock.
 - c. a different way to celebrate.
2. Marco and Dora agree that ...
 - a. a 40th birthday is more special than other birthdays.
 - b. ageing is a bad thing.
 - c. both of the above are true.

3. Charles sees himself as someone who ...
 - a. prefers to be in the background.
 - b. likes to be the centre of attention.
 - c. organises nice things for other people.
4. Describe Marco's feelings about his child's ninth birthday party.
 - a. He's not looking forward to it.
 - b. He's looking forward to it.
 - c. It's a sensitive topic for him.
5. Why can't he organise a trip to the cinema for the ninth birthday party?
 - a. Children prefer to go rock-climbing.
 - b. Another child has had a cinema party recently.
 - c. It's not a good idea to repeat parties from the year before.
6. Charles stopped celebrating birthdays because ...
 - a. he thinks they're not suitable for adults.
 - b. it became hard to find people to celebrate with.
 - c. it's less fun when you can't play kids' games.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

feet	retro	attention-seeking	hassle
touchy	shudder	turn up	key

1. Charles complains that organising his own party is a
2. The idea of a surprise party makes Charles
3. He doesn't like having to pretend to be delighted by a party when he thought he was going home to put his up.
4. Marco says the fear that no one is going to is even worse when it's your child's birthday.
5. Dora is offended that Charles says she is
6. Marco realises that birthdays can be a subject.
7. Charles likes drinks with friends or dinner – celebrations that are quite low-.....
8. They agree that having a children's style party could be fun and

Discussion

Do you celebrate your birthday?

Transcript

Marco: The big four-oh, Charles!

Dora: Oh!! It's your 40th!

Marco: Are you planning a party?

Charles: Nah, I never celebrate birthdays. I don't see why this one should be any different.

Dora: Why not?

Charles: First, you know me, I can't be bothered with the hassle. It's my birthday but I'm supposed to do all the hard work – contacting people, finding a venue, organising food, worrying who will show up. No, thanks.

Marco: Ah, someone's angling for a surprise party, eh, Dora?

Charles: Marco, stop! Even worse. Having to pretend to be delighted 50 people just sprang up in your living room when you thought you were coming home to put your feet up. Probably having a heart attack at the shock.

Dora: Note to self: never to organise you a surprise party. OK then!

Marco: You've got to do something, though, Charles. It's your 40th.

Charles: Why? What's so great about getting old?

Dora: Er ... still being here to have your birthday?

Marco: Yeah, 'Ageing is better than the alternative', as they say.

Dora: Yeah, and it's true – so why not celebrate?

Charles: You guys can have parties for your 40ths if you like. I just don't go in for that kind of self-indulgent attention-seeking.

Dora: Wow, that's a bit harsh! I had a huge bash for my 30th. And you came. And enjoyed yourself if I recall. Are you trying to say I was just doing it for attention?

Charles: Not exactly ... but ... well ... at least a small part of you must have been.

Dora: Remind me not to invite you to my 40th then, so you won't have to put up with my huge ego while I feed you and provide free drinks all night because I thought we were friends.

Charles: I meant, er, I mean, not all attention-seeking is bad. It's just not my style is all.

Dora: Whereas it is mine?

Marco: Anyway ...

Charles: I didn't say that!

Dora: Er, yes, yes, you did. You said celebrating birthdays is self-indulgent and ...

Marco: Guys, guys! Who knew birthdays was such a touchy subject? Speaking of which, I have to sort out my nine-year-old's party the weekend after next.

Charles: Now, that's a party I'd love to organise.

Marco: Really? It's a nightmare. It's not like when we were kids. Now you have to take them all rock-climbing or hire a make-up artist to come and teach them how to look like a zombie or a film star. And there'd be trouble if someone else in school had the same kind of party and your kid gets accused of copying. That fear you said about no one turning up? It's a million times worse when you're scared your kid is going to have no one turn up.

Charles: Is there that much pressure?

Marco: Yeah, it's crazy. Last year, I got it right with a cinema trip. Simple, but always a winner. But we can't do the same thing again apparently. It says it in my 'Official Laws for 9-Year-Olds' book.

Charles: That's a pity. I've got so many fond memories of birthday parties as a kid. Party food and games and watching cartoons until your parents arrived.

Marco: Trust me, your parents were stressing out!

Dora: At the risk of restarting the argument, when do you think you stopped enjoying birthdays then?

Charles: I dunno really ... somewhere around moving away from home and getting a job and being a grown-up. I don't mean birthdays are immature. I mean, it takes a while to make new friends and so birthdays just become more low-key and it's drinks with a couple of friends or dinner or something. And I just got out of the habit, I guess. Maybe I just need to have a kids-style party like we used to have! Play musical chairs and eat pineapple and cheese on sticks and all that.

Dora: Very retro. I bet people would love that.

Marco: Yeah, they would. Well, I would anyway. And maybe it'll catch on with my kids and it'll start a new party trend.

Charles: You've got me thinking ... it's not a terrible idea. Maybe I will have a party this year!

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. c
3. a
4. f
5. b
6. h
7. g
8. e

Task 1

1. b
2. a
3. a
4. a
5. c
6. b

Task 2

1. hassle
2. shudder
3. feet
4. turn up
5. attention-seeking
6. touchy
7. key
8. retro