

The magical birthday for Ethan

„Ethan and friends are recruited as secret Field Agents to decode clues, collect nature evidence, and build the Field HQ.“

BIRTHDAY

6th birthday

DATE

October 17, 2026

TIME

14:00–17:00

LOCATION

Oak Park, IL —
apartment +
park (5 min
walk)



The Neighborhood Field Agents

Orientation & framework

Ethan · 6

Imaginative, curious; reserved at first; thrives with clear purpose

Interests: LEGO, building, maps, hidden objects, secret codes, drawing

Favorites: dogs, squirrels, birds, blue/orange/green

Special: A mission built entirely for him in his own neighborhood

DATE

October 17, 2026

TIME

14:00–17:00

LOCATION

Oak Park, IL — apartment + park (5 min walk)

BUDGET

150 \$

CHILDREN

6

ADULTS

6

Guest group & framework

Children: Noah 7, Liam 7, Ava 6, Maya 7, Mia 4

Age: 4–7

Participation needs: Mia gets helper role; all activities seated or small-movement

Framework: Oct Chicago weather may force full indoor; no running indoors; no large furniture moves; no expensive venue

The Neighborhood Field Agents

Ethan and friends are recruited as secret Field Agents to decode clues, collect nature evidence, and build the Field HQ.

Briefing → park recon → HQ build → final decode → cake. Ethan=Lead Agent; Mia=Supply Keeper.

SIGNATURE MAGIC

Operation: Neighborhood Recon

Each child receives a handmade Agent Dossier with code name, map, and cipher key. Group walks to park, collects nature evidence, returns to decode a hidden message naming Ethan as Lead Agent — then finds Dad's classified birthday drawing inside the HQ box.

Setup

Dad prepares 6 dossiers. Ethan draws map; Dad prints 6 copies. Env 1 under picnic table (shift-3 encoded). Env 2 under bookshelf (shift-3 encoded, personal message). Dad's drawing hidden in HQ box.

Birthday child's role

Lead Agent — holds master map, assigns collection zones, opens final envelope.

Supervision

Both adults walk to park. One leads group; one manages Mia and rear.

Fallback

Full indoor: hide 4 envelopes across apartment zones; flashlight search replaces park walk; printed nature cards replace outdoor collection.

Memory

Each child keeps dossier and Field Log. Group photo at HQ before cake.

CONFIRMATIONS

C1 · Park access

Critical · Unresolved

Park freely accessible Oct 17?

Safe default: Indoor fallback

C2 · Weather

Critical · Unresolved

Check forecast 09:00 Oct 17; indoor if below 50°F or rain

Safe default: Indoor fallback

C3 · Already-have items

Critical · Unresolved

Confirm: 3 flashlights, 4 cardboard boxes, LEGO, string, markers, tape, 15 sheets paper

Safe default: Buy any missing

C4 · Second adult

Critical · Unresolved

One adult besides Dad confirmed for park walk?

Safe default: Plan works with 2 adults

Shopping & materials

Cardstock sheets (dossiers, signs)

Buy · Essential · 20
sheets · 0.05–0.1 \$

Envelopes (clue drops)

Buy · Essential · 6
envelopes · 0.1–0.2 \$

Pizza, large cheese

Buy · Essential · 2 large
pizza · 14–18 \$

Pizza, large pepperoni

Buy · Essential · 1 large
pizza · 14–18 \$

Strawberries

Buy · Essential · 2 lb · 3–
5 \$

Popcorn, microwave bags

Buy · Essential · 3 bags ·
1–1.5 \$

Apple juice boxes

Buy · Essential · 12 juice
boxes · 0.5–0.8 \$

Cupcake mix, plain vanilla

Buy · Essential · 1 box ·
2.5–4 \$

Frosting, blue or orange

Buy · Essential · 1 can · 2–
3.5 \$

Birthday candles, 6-count pack

Buy · Essential · 1 pack ·
1.5–2.5 \$

Paper plates, 24-count pack

Buy · Essential · 1 pack ·
2.5–4 \$

Napkins, 50-count pack

Buy · Essential · 1 pack ·
2–3.5 \$

Plastic cups, 24-count pack

Buy · Essential · 1 pack ·
2.5–4 \$

Small paper bags (take-home)

Buy · Recommended · 6
bags · 0.2–0.4 \$

Stickers, star or badge style

Buy · Recommended · 1
sheet pack · 1.5–3 \$

Shopping & materials

Bird feather (pre-placed in evidence bag)

Buy · Recommended · 1 feather · 0.5–2 \$

Colored markers (blue, orange, green, black)

Already available · Essential · 1 set

Printer paper (Field Logs, cipher keys, clue sheets, map copies)

Already available · Essential · 15 sheets

Tape, masking or clear

Already available · Essential · 1 roll

Flashlights (indoor fallback)

Already available · Essential · 3 flashlights

LEGO bricks

Already available · Essential · 1 box

Cardboard boxes (HQ construction)

Already available · Essential · 4 boxes

String or twine

Already available · Essential · 1 roll

Basic first-aid kit

Already available · Essential · 1 kit

Coffee or tea (adult beverage)

Already available · Optional · 1 pot

Preparation steps & zones

Draw map + print 6 copies

3–5 days before · 30 min

Ethan draws block map (apartment, route, park, 2 clue spots). Dad photographs and prints 6 copies. Insert one in each dossier.

Assemble 6 Agent Dossiers

3–5 days before · 30 min

Print per agent: Field Log (rows: Leaf, Seed/pinecone, Bark rubbing, Animal sketch or sign, Best discovery) and cipher key (shift-3 table: A→D, B→E ... Z→C). Fold cardstock into booklet; write code name on cover: Ethan=Lead Agent, Mia=Supply Keeper, Noah/Liam=Navigator, Ava/Maya=Evidence Analyst. Insert map, Field Log, cipher key. Seal with sticker.

Bake cupcakes

Day before · 60 min

Bake 12 cupcakes. Frost blue or orange. Place 6 candles on Ethan's cupcake. Store covered at room temperature.

Hide clue envelopes + set up zones

Morning of party · 20 min

Outdoor mode — Env 1: tape under picnic table by 13:30. Plaintext: RETURN TO BASE. Ciphertext (shift-3): UHWXUQ WR EDVH. Write ciphertext on card inside envelope. Env 2: place under bookshelf. Plaintext: MISSION COMPLETE LEAD AGENT ETHAN REPORT TO HQ FOR CLASSIFIED DELIVERY. Ciphertext (shift-3): PLVVLRQ FRPSOHWH OHDG DJHQW HWKDQ UHSRUW WR KT IRU FODVVLILHG GHOLYHU. Write ciphertext on card inside envelope. Indoor mode — hide Env A behind living room cushion, Env B under kitchen bowl, Env C at bedroom doorframe, Env D on bookshelf (same Env 2 ciphertext). Place Dad's drawing inside HQ box. Living room: lay boxes, LEGO, string, markers, tape; post FIELD HQ sign. Entrance: stack dossiers on chair, post RECRUITMENT sign. Kitchen: plates, napkins, cups, popcorn bowl, strawberries, juice boxes, water pitcher. Confirm pizza delivery for 15:30.

SETUP ZONES

Mission Briefing Corner

Living room — near entrance

Stack 6 dossiers on chair, Post FIELD AGENT RECRUITMENT sign, Adult hands dossier to each arriving child

Safety: Keep path to door clear

Field HQ Build Zone

Living room floor

Lay cardboard boxes flat (Dad's drawing hidden inside one), Place LEGO, markers, tape, string within reach, Leave floor space for 6 children seated

Safety: Adults pre-cut cardboard; no child scissors; clear trip hazards

Food Station

Kitchen counter and table

Plates, napkins, cups in row, Popcorn in bowl, Strawberries halved in bowl, Juice boxes in basket, Water pitcher on counter

Safety: Hot pizza handled by adults only

Activity flow

Agent Recruitment & Briefing

20 min

Hand each arriving child their dossier. Agents decorate cover with stickers while waiting. Once all 6 present, Ethan reads mission objective aloud. Roles as assigned on dossier covers. Older children attempt cipher independently; adult reads with Mia.

Safety: Keep arrival area calm; no running; adults manage coats and shoes

Fallback: If child is shy, adult reads briefing aloud and invites child to follow along

Park Recon & Nature Evidence Collection

40 min

Walk to park (~10 min each way, ~20 min at park). Ethan assigns collection zones using map. Each child collects: 1 leaf, 1 seed or pinecone, 1 bark rubbing. Evidence bag contains pre-placed bird feather — Mia presents it as first artifact. Children look for birds or squirrels and sketch one sighting or sign (feather, nest, tracks, chewed acorn) in Field Log. Navigators confirm return route. Evidence Analysts verify all Field Log rows filled. Ethan finds park envelope; group decodes UHWXUQ WR EDVH together.

Safety: Both adults count all 6 children before leaving park.

Fallback: Indoor: flashlight search across 4 pre-hidden envelope zones; printed nature cards replace outdoor collection; bark rubbing on rough cardboard

Field HQ Construction

20 min

Children build HQ from cardboard boxes, LEGO, string, markers. Ethan directs layout using map. Each agent decorates one section. Mia places the bird feather inside HQ as first artifact; adult asks: 'Which bird do you think left this?' Each agent then reports one observation about their own collected item from the park, linking the outdoor collection to the HQ display. Adults assist with tape only.

Safety: Adults pre-cut cardboard; no child scissors; clear trip hazards

Fallback: If space very tight, one large box decorated by all children together

Final Decode & Mission Complete

10 min

Ethan finds bookshelf envelope. Group decodes: PLVVLRQ FRPSOHWH OHDG DJHQW HWKDQ UHSRUW WR KT IRU FODVVLHG GHOLYHU → MISSION COMPLETE LEAD AGENT ETHAN REPORT TO HQ FOR CLASSIFIED DELIVERY. Adult announces mission complete. Ethan opens HQ box and finds Dad's classified birthday drawing. Group cheers. Group photo at HQ.

Safety: Keep energy calm; transition directly to food

Fallback: If decoding stalls, adult gives one-letter hint

Pizza & Popcorn Debrief

25 min

Children sit at table or on floor with plates. Adults serve pizza, popcorn, strawberries, juice. Adults share from all three pizzas; self-serve coffee or tea.

Safety: Check pizza temperature before serving; cut Mia's pizza smaller

Fallback: If pizza late, serve popcorn and strawberries first; extend by 10 min

Activity flow

Birthday Cupcakes

15 min

Adult announces: 'Mission rations incoming.' Bring cupcake tray. Light Ethan's candle. Sing happy birthday. Ethan blows out candle. One cupcake per child.

Safety: Adult holds tray with lit candle; children remain seated during singing

Fallback: Cupcakes pre-baked; no fallback needed

Free Build & Goodbye

30 min

Children play freely with LEGO or continue HQ. Adults collect dossiers and Field Logs from children, place each set in a paper bag, hand bags out at goodbye. Help with coats.

Safety: Supervise Mia around small LEGO pieces

Fallback: If children tired, skip free build and move directly to goodbye

FOOD, DRINKS & CAKE

Serving: Serve after mission complete at ~15:35. Adults plate and distribute. Children seated. Pepperoni pizza primarily for adults and older children.

Cheese pizza, large

2 large pizza

Gluten, dairy. Primary for all children.

Pepperoni pizza, large

1 large pizza

Gluten, dairy, pork. Primarily adults/older children.

Strawberries, halved

2 lb

None

Popcorn, plain/lightly salted

3 bags popped

Check label for dairy

Drinks

Apple juice boxes

12 juice boxes

None. For children.

Coffee or tea (self-serve)

1 pot

None. Household supply.

Water

2 liters still water in pitcher on kitchen counter; available throughout event

Cake

12 vanilla cupcakes, blue or orange frosting. Ethan's cupcake has 6 candles, centered on tray. Served at ~16:00.

Allergies

No known allergies. Confirm at RSVP and day-before reminder. Cheese pizza safe default for all children. Check popcorn label for dairy.

NATURE & ANIMALS

Nature

Each child collects a real leaf, seed or pinecone, and makes a bark rubbing at the park. Items logged in Field Log and placed in HQ as mission artifacts.

Animals

Pre-placed bird feather in evidence bag; Mia presents it as first artifact at HQ. Adult asks: 'Which bird left this?' Each agent reports one observation about their collected park item, linking outdoor collection to HQ display.

Execution

Outdoor: direct collection and observation at park. Indoor fallback: printed field guide cards as evidence items; feather still pre-placed; bark rubbing on rough cardboard.

Fallback

Potted plant leaf, printed animal cards, rough cardboard rubbing, pre-placed feather — all used indoors.

The day in sequence

Weather check & mode decision

09:00–09:30

Check forecast. Below 50°F or rain: activate indoor fallback.

Final prep & clue placement

09:30–10:30

Outdoor: tape Env 1 under picnic table (ciphertext: UHWXUQ WR EDVH). Indoor: hide Env A–D only. Set up all apartment zones. Confirm pizza delivery for 15:30. Place Dad's drawing inside HQ box.

Final readiness

13:30–14:00

HQ zone clear. Dossiers stacked at door. Popcorn ready. Water pitcher filled. Stickers out. Both adults briefed. First-aid kit in bag.

Arrival & Agent Recruitment

14:00–14:20

Hand each child their dossier. Agents decorate cover with stickers. Once all 6 present, Ethan reads mission objective. Roles as assigned on dossier covers.

Park Recon & Nature Collection

14:20–15:00

Both adults walk group to park and back. Children collect evidence and sketch one sighting or sign. Navigators confirm return route. Evidence Analysts verify Field Logs filled. Ethan finds and group decodes park clue. Return to apartment.

Field HQ Construction

15:00–15:20

Children build HQ. Ethan directs. Mia places feather; adult asks which bird left it. Each agent reports one observation about their own collected park item. Adults assist with tape only.

Final Decode & Mission Complete

15:20–15:30

Ethan finds bookshelf envelope. Group decodes personal message naming him Lead Agent. Adult announces mission complete. Ethan opens HQ box and finds Dad's drawing. Group photo.

Calm transition

15:30–15:35

Children wash hands. Adults set food on table. Keep atmosphere calm.

Pizza & Popcorn Debrief

15:35–16:00

Serve pizza, popcorn, strawberries, juice. Adults share from all three pizzas; self-serve coffee or tea.

Birthday Cupcakes

16:00–16:15

Announce: 'Mission rations incoming.' Bring cupcake tray. Light Ethan's candle. Sing. Ethan blows out. One cupcake per child.

Free Build & Wind Down

16:15–16:30

Children play with LEGO or continue HQ. Adults collect dossiers and Field Logs, place each set in a paper bag, hand bags out at goodbye.

The day in sequence

Goodbyes & Pickup

16:30–17:00

Hand each child their take-home bag as parents arrive. Help with coats. Thank families.

Protection, comfort & contingencies

Supervision

Adult A (Dad): leads park walk, runs final decode, Adult B: manages Mia, rear of park group, assists indoors

Physical safety

No running inside apartment, No tree climbing; children stay within adult sight at park, Adults pre-cut all cardboard; no child scissors, Hot pizza handled by adults only, First-aid kit in adult bag at park

Allergies

No known allergies; confirm at RSVP and day-before reminder, Cheese pizza safe default for all children, Check popcorn label for dairy

Emotional comfort

Ethan has defined Lead Agent role; never put him on the spot, Mia has Supply Keeper role; adult guides her decode steps, Reluctant child: adult quietly invites them to observe first, If Mia is distressed at park, Adult B returns with her; Adult A counts 5 remaining

Overstimulation

Adult quietly moves overwhelmed child to kitchen for 2-minute calm break with water. Resume when ready. No group attention drawn.

Rain or cold

Immediate: Activate indoor fallback: hide Env A-D; flashlight search replaces park walk

Fallback: Printed nature cards and pre-placed feather replace outdoor collection

Trigger: Below 50°F or precipitation by 09:00

Pizza late

Immediate: Serve popcorn and strawberries immediately

Fallback: Pizza served as second course; extend debrief by 10 min

Trigger: Pizza not arrived by 15:30

Child refuses to participate

Immediate: Offer observer role with small task (hold evidence bag)

Fallback: Allow free LEGO build nearby

Trigger: Child disengages

Protection, comfort & contingencies

Group too loud

Trigger: Noise rises and Ethan visibly withdraws

Immediate: Adult calls Mission Pause — all agents freeze and listen

Fallback: Redirect to seated HQ build

Park headcount

Trigger: Before leaving park

Immediate: Both adults count all 6 children before walking back

Fallback: Do not leave park until all 6 confirmed

Messages to parents

Invitation

3 weeks before

You're invited to Ethan's 6th birthday! Secret neighborhood mission: Saturday, October 17, 2:00–5:00 PM, Oak Park. Agents get a classified dossier, explore the neighborhood, collect evidence, and build a Field HQ. RSVP by October 10.

Allergy question

3 weeks before, with invitation

Any food allergies or dietary needs? We'll serve pizza, popcorn, strawberries, and cupcakes.

Clothing note

1 week before

We may walk to the neighborhood park — please dress your child in comfortable layers and weather-appropriate shoes. Warm indoor backup ready if needed.

Day-before reminder

Day before

See you tomorrow at 2:00 PM! Please let us know about any food allergies if you haven't yet.

CLEANUP

During goodbyes (16:30–17:00)

Collect coats. Clear food table into trash bag.

After all guests leave

Fold/store or recycle cardboard HQ. Return LEGO to box. Wipe kitchen surfaces. Bag disposables. Sweep floor.

Thank you



**Thank you for using the Magic
Children's App. We wish you and
Ethan an unforgettable birthday
filled with many magical moments.**