



Family & Kids

READERS' CHOICE

Kids' clothing
Chocolate Soup

Place for a birthday party
Dish It Out

Park for kids
Freedom Park

Place to go after school
Ben 'n' Jerry's

Place to go on a rainy day
Discovery Place

Ballot Blooper
Place to go on a rainy day
Arizona
Well, it is dry there.

Place to go after school
YMCA of Greater Charlotte

Nearly 1,500 students in the Charlotte region leave school each day and head to the YMCA. Instructors promote important traits and values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, caring, and faith. And kids participate in indoor and outdoor sports as well as crafts, cheerleading, cooking, foreign- and sign-language classes after school, thanks to the Y.
Various locations, 704-716-6200

Place to buy kids' clothing
Chocolate Soup

No, it's not frou-frou fancy. Yes, it's a fabulous place to stock up on kids' shirts without losing yours. Chocolate Soup ladles out lots of pants, skirts, and dresses. Its namesake clothing line is joined by Petite Ami, le top, Baby Lulu, Anavini, and others, most at discounted prices. Choose from boys' clothes in sizes newborn to seven and girls' clothes in sizes newborn to sixteen.
4732 Sharon Road, Sharon Corners, 704-556-0889

Place for a birthday party
Your own home—with Oogles 'N' Googles

No kidding. With the help of Oogles 'N' Googles party services, you can host a dinosaur hunt, teddy bear tea, or pop rock party for your child's next birthday and maintain your sanity, too. They bring all the supplies to you and do it all—set

up, clean up, and everything in between. No muss, no fuss, and you're an instant hero. A complete package for twelve kids costs about \$350.
Waxhaw, 704-849-7942

Place to buy a birthday cake
Suarez Bakery

This family-owned bakeshop has been dishing up confection perfection for Charlotteans since the 1950s. Whether you're honoring your eighty-year-old grandmother or paying homage to Barbie for your eight-year-old daughter, they'll whip up something that fits the bill. Describe what you want and they'll come up with an original gâteau that looks great and tastes sublime.
4245 Park Road, Park Road Shopping Center, 704-525-0145

Daycare
Cranfield Academy

Not only is this four-star-rated, privately owned daycare and preschool clean, colorful, and well-managed, it provides free Starbucks coffee for parents each morning, fruit in the afternoon, dry cleaning drop-offs, haircuts for the kids, and optional in-house soccer train-

ing, music lessons, gym classes, and computer classes for the older children (for an added fee). It also offers infant and toddler daycare through transitional kindergarten.
11330 Carmel Commons Boulevard, 704-341-2233

Kid-friendly restaurant
Red Robin

With three area locations, kids get full on food and fun while parents can enjoy a hefty burger and grown-up beverage. A great kids menu (Grilled Cheesewich, Carnival Corn Dog) includes bottomless baskets of steak fries (fry refills—brilliant!) and is served up in a colorful environment. In addition to the requisite balloons and crayons, there are also in-floor TVs and video games.
8304 Kenbrooke Drive 704-971-2060; 8425 Northlake Commons Boulevard, Northlake Mall, 704-494-4660; 3415 Toringdon Way, Toringdon at Ballantyne, 704-541-3233

Free outing
Imaginon

You don't pay a penny (well, unless you count those property taxes) to visit this public

Kids' hair salon
Snip-its

Walking through the door here is like walking into an alternate, brilliantly colorful world. Your child can watch movies or play video games while a patient, friendly stylist cuts and coils. Afterward, she can pop a bit of her hair into the "magic box" in exchange for a prize. You get a prize, too—no more tantrums and tears at haircut time. A wash, cut, and blow-dry, including a choice of fun and fruity shampoo scents, costs \$16.95.
8625 Lindholm Drive, Birkdale Village, 704-987-0940