



## PLANNING A BIRTHDAY PARTY

All children deserve to have their birthdays celebrated every year. Children on the autism spectrum are no different in this respect and deserve no less! However there are Birthday Parties and there are BIRTHDAY PARTIES. You know your child best, and you know what will make your child happiest. To help you plan, keep these ideas in mind:

**LOCATION** - What pleases your child? All children are different. Your child may be happiest at home, in a park, in the gym, or even within his or her regularly scheduled routines and activities.

**ACTIVITY** - Which activities are the most fun for your child and.... is he or she able to share these activities? (Consider swimming, gym activities, LEGO™, a trip to a museum to view the dinosaur exhibit, inflatable bouncers, and music parties.)

**GUESTS** — Who and how many should be invited? Is this a party where only the immediate family attends, or should it be extended to cousins, grandparents, etc? Or is this a party for friends from school, extra curricular activities, etc.? Do you invite the parents?

**FOOD** - What to serve? Traditional cake and ice cream? Healthy snacks? Your child's favorite foods?

**GIFTS** - To open, or not to open? To request donations instead of gifts? What happens if your child doesn't get his or her greatly anticipated gift?

**PARTY FAVORS** - Something simple makes the most sense.

**INVITATIONS** - Email, design and make them, store bought? Distribute by hand, by snail mail, email?

Wow, that's quite a lot to think about. Before you discuss it with your child, think

about yourself:

- How much do you want to take on?
- How much can you possibly do?
- And how much can you afford?

Now.... Think about your child....

- How much can your child handle?
- What can your child's sensory system tolerate?
- How are your child's social skills related to birthday party etiquette?

Next.... Make some decisions. Choose a few options so your child can have some choice while planning the party. Plan for the ideal and be prepared for anything!

Limit the venue to the top two locations where you know your child will be comfortable and be pleased to have others in his or her space and company. Then let your child choose the location/venue from the two options.

Develop a timeline/schedule: (Perhaps make a picture schedule)

- Make your guest list
- Consider creating your invitation. If your child likes arts and crafts - involve him; if computers is her thing, do an e-invite. If you write the invitations out, have your child distribute them. Remember to put your menu on the invitation for food allergies or preferences. If children will not eat what you will have available, encourage parents to bring their own snacks.
- Have your child participate in choosing the party favors. (Bubbles or small toys are good options.)
- Practice, plan, and rehearse greeting guests and being gracious. "Thank you for coming to my party and thank you for the gift." Use a Social Story™.
- Have a space available for children who need quiet time during the party.
- Consider hiring your favorite babysitter or classroom aide to help.
- Remember less is more. One hour of fun is better than risking a longer afternoon with the chance of unhappy, over-stimulated children.
- When it is all over, think about next year and note what worked and what didn't.

Plan ahead for what might cause sensory overload for your child. For example, if lighting candles and singing Happy Birthday is too much, simply skip that part. Acknowledge that your child is one year older and celebrate that!

To help your child prepare for the party, visit your local library. It will likely have a good selection of children's books about birthday parties. Children on the autism spectrum may not understand a story about a monster having a birthday party, or they may not relate to a story about somebody else's birthday party. Two more direct examples are:

- Happy Birthday by Roger Priddy. This board book illustrates several aspects of a birthday party, including invitations, balloons, and cake, to name a few, without the complications of un-human characters or other distractions.
- Happy Birthday by K.P. Hallinan. This book describes what happens and how to behave at a birthday party.

Related Articles:

- [Ideas and Themes for Birthday Parties](#)
- [Suggestions for a Birthday Party Social Story](#)
- [Attending Another Child's Birthday Party](#)
- [Making Friends](#)

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