



## SUGGESTIONS FOR A BIRTHDAY PARTY SOCIAL STORY

Social Stories™ describe an event or situation with the intent of explaining the circumstances, perspectives, and expected behaviors that occur during the event or situation. To be effective, Social Stories™ should be highly individualized. Usually, they are written in the first-person, from the point of view of the child. Frequently, they may include pictures or photos of the individuals involved. They can be particularly helpful when preparing for an out of the ordinary situation, such as hosting or going to a birthday party. Once created, a Social Story™ should be read to the individual many times until the expectations conveyed in the story are well understood.

To prepare your child on the autism spectrum for hosting or attending a birthday party, consider making your own Social Story™ using picture icons, photos from the Internet, or photos from last year's party.

### *Ideas for a Social Story™ for a Child Celebrating a Birthday:*

- Describe what will happen before the party. (For example, does your child need to wear something special? Will you clean up the house and put away special toys? Will you drive to the party venue?)
- Describe the location of the party. (If your child has been there before, will it be different for the party — for example, decorations or certain parts which are off limits?)
- Describe the order of events. It is a good idea to have a simple activity for children to do while they wait for everyone to arrive and to have organized activities throughout the time of the party.
- If you are serving a meal or cake, be specific about when this will occur and what will happen. Will everyone sing “Happy Birthday?” (Might it be a different version than your child knows, for example, the “cha cha cha” version.) Will your child blow out candles? Prepare your child for clapping afterwards.

- Describe how you expect your child to behave. For example, “I will take turns,” or “I will be ok if I do not win the game.”
- If your child will be opening presents at the party (this is not always done, even for typically developing children), make sure to prepare your child for opening a gift he or she doesn’t like and for saying “thank you” to everyone. Let your child know that some children may want to look at or touch his or her gifts and that this is ok.
- Tell your child what he or she can do if he or she feels overwhelmed. For example, “I will go to *(a predetermined area)* and tell my Mom I need a break.”
- Describe what will happen at the end of the party (party favors, etc.).

*Ideas for Social Story™ for a Child Going To Someone Else’s Party:*

- Describe what will happen before the party. (Does your child need to wear something special or will you have a long drive to the party?)
- Describe the location of the party. (If your child has been there before, will it be different for the party — decorations or certain parts which are off limits?)
- Describe the order of events. If you are unsure, call the family hosting the party to ask, or, if the party is at a local venue that hosts lots of children’s parties, call and ask them if they have a standard schedule that is used.
- Make sure your child knows what to expect at cake time. The guests will sing “Happy Birthday” (or a version of it), and then the birthday child will blow out the candles. Then the guests may clap and cheer. Be sure to remind your child that he or she will need to wait his or her turn to get a piece of cake. If your child is on a special diet, be sure to bring a special treat that your child can have when the other children eat the party food.
- Describe how you expect your child to behave. For example, “I will take turns,” or “I will be ok if I do not win the game.”
- Some children on the autism spectrum do not like balloons. Some have a fear of them popping and making a loud, unexpected noise. Mention that there may be balloons at the party and what your child can do if he or she becomes startled by them.
- Prepare your child for the opening of gifts — that it may or may not occur — and that the gifts belong to the birthday child.
- Tell your child what he or she can do if he or she feels overwhelmed. For

example, “I will go to (*a predetermined area*) and tell my Mom I need a break.”

- Describe what will happen at the end of the party. “I may receive a party favor and will say thank you even if I don’t like it.” “I will say thank you for having me.”

#### Related Articles:

- [Planning a Birthday Party](#)
- [Ideas and Themes for Birthday Parties](#)
- [Attending Another Child’s Birthday Party](#)
- [Making Friends](#)

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