



Planning a Birthday Party for a Child with Autism

When planning a birthday party for a child with autism, there are different ways you can help to make your child's special day a great experience. Here are a few suggestions to consider as you plan the celebration.

Location

- A birthday party may not be a good time to introduce a new environment to your child. Get your child's input on where he/she would like to hold the party if possible.
- Talk with venue staff to ensure they are trained in the basics of autism and the specific needs of the children involved in the party.

Activity

- When thinking about what will happen during the party, choose activities that your child enjoys and is already familiar with.

Food

- When choosing birthday treats and snacks, consider the dietary and sensory needs and preferences of your child. If other children with autism will be attending, it may be helpful to offer a wider variety of food choices. You may want to consider offering food after a physical activity.

Gifts

- The social attention of opening gifts may cause anxiety for some children. You may want to open gifts after the party has ended. Another option is to ask guests to give a gift card to a favorite store or restaurant or bring a donation to a local food bank or charity in place of a gift.

Guests

- Some children are most comfortable with only the immediate family being invited. However, if you are connected with other families in the autism community, a birthday party may be a good way to allow parents to connect while the children are able to be themselves.
- Have a space available for children who need quiet time during the party.
- Consider having a favorite babysitter or classroom aide there to help.

Sensory Considerations

- It is important to plan ahead for activities that may cause sensory overload for your child. Lighting candles and singing may be too much for a child to handle

Picture schedules and/or Social Story

- Developing a picture schedule or social story for your child about what to expect on their special day can help lessen anxiety and make the experience great!
- Learn more: <https://www.carautismroadmap.org/suggestions-for-a-birthday-party-social-story/>

This information sheet was developed by the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT).

For more information, please contact ASERT at 877-231-4244 or info@PAautism.org

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