



## Quick Guide to:



# Throwing a Party for a Child with Autism

Parties can really boost self-esteem and help children to have a sense of themselves. But they can also be overwhelming: large, unfamiliar surroundings; lots of people; music, games and entertainers; food; receiving presents and wearing party clothes or costumes can all make parties challenging for children and their families alike. Here are our top tips for a fun time!



Have a practice party with 1 or 2 friends. This helps to prepare your child and gives you a chance to see which parts of a party they enjoy or want to avoid. Role play with their toys if easier.

Help is important! Ask a relative or friend to be your party buddy. You need someone to take over if your child needs you. Offer to help them at a party and hope they return the favour.

Don't be afraid to keep the party short and the group small. You can always send treats for the whole class into school if your child doesn't like crowded parties.

A theme can be a good idea and can help your child to get involved with the planning. Letting them choose decorations and help you put them up can make it less daunting.

If your child doesn't like surprises, ask guests to put a picture of their gift on the gift tag or write what is inside. Clear cellophane wrapping or putting the gift in a gift bag without wrapping are other options.

Opening presents at home after the event can save a child from the pressure of giving the expected response or saying "thank you" for a gift they don't like!

Choose a setting that's familiar to your child and let them get used to the surroundings before other guests arrive. If it's a place where they've attended a party before, let them know what will be the same or different this time.

Have a time plan and structure for what you're going to do. Share this with your child with a simple set of visuals or Social Story. You can add photos to this afterwards as a reminder for next year.

Choose games with no clear winner: losing can be so hard! A prize that everyone can share such as a bag of party blowers (cheap ones make no noise!) can work well.

Have a break out space if your child has had enough. A pop-up tent? A side room at a hall? Fill it with calming or favourite activities and take a break with your child if they need to.

Keep food plain and simple. It's your party so it's fine to just have the things that your child likes.

Had a great party? Please tell us what went well: [m.nadarajah@kentishtown.camden.sch.uk](mailto:m.nadarajah@kentishtown.camden.sch.uk)



## Quick Guide to:



# Inviting a child with Autism to a party

If you've read our guide to throwing a party for a child with Autism, you know why parties can be challenging. But that doesn't mean children with Autism don't want to be invited. Far from it! A few simple changes can make sure the party is fun for everyone. The most important message our parents had was: "PLEASE INVITE US AND PLEASE SPEAK TO US ABOUT WHAT WOULD HELP. WE PROMISE NOT TO BE OFFENDED." All children are different and developing all the time. What was hard last year might be fine now!

If possible, give a rough idea of timings/activities on the invitation. Some children might just join you for the food section or for the cake. Others might only want to join the main activity and then go. Our website has some printable visuals.

Some children might like some time to get used to the space before the party starts if this is possible. If there's a really busy activity such as a bouncy castle, could they come for a bit before everyone else?

If there's going to be an entertainer, could they come and meet them before they walk into the room. Their costume might be scary or it might be hard to wait to talk to them.

Consider children's different sensory needs. Some children don't like loud noises or music. Others find bright lights or strong smells challenging. So, for example, a smoke machine could be really fun for some children but horrible for others.

Have a quiet area away from the main party for anyone finding it a bit much. Parents will happily bring along favourite activities to put in this area if you ask.

Keep food covered until it's time to eat. Put a few snacks in the quiet area for children who find it hard to wait. For younger children, it may be a good idea to keep the birthday cake out of reach too.

If you're encouraging children to dress up for the party, have a few extras in a box that children can help themselves to if they want. It's not always easy to decide on a costume ahead of time, but not having one when your friends are dressed up might be hard.

Keep food simple and separate. One filling in a sandwich for example. It's easier to choose if things are not mixed together. Children with allergies can also see what they can/can't eat if the food is simple.

Where possible, give warnings that each activity is coming to an end: "five minutes until food time" or "two more songs and then it's home time".

Please do not be offended if, after all this careful thought, your guest doesn't join in or leaves early. This might have been a difficult day for other reasons or they might have had enough fun for them already. **PLEASE STILL INVITE THEM NEXT TIME!**

Some of our older pupils know all about their diagnosis but most of the younger pupils do not. We thank you for your continued sensitivity in talking about Autism with your children. It can be more helpful to talk about what they have in common with their friends and what they like to do differently.

Ideas from the parents and carers'

**Autism Awareness Week 2016** coffee morning.