

DMR Northeast Region ACCESS Team

Party and Holiday Survival Guide

For All Kids, Especially For Those With
Autism, Sensory Difficulties or Other Challenges

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November 2008

FOR PARTIES THAT YOU GO TO:

BEFORE the party:

Tip #1: Take two vehicles

If your child needs leave early, not all of the family needs to leave.

Tip #2: Arrange a Check-in Signal

For older kids, arrange a check-in signal so that only you know when your child needs to take a break or leave.

Tip #3: Breaks

Tell your child that you may suggest that he/she take a break or help you in the kitchen before dinner and to not assume that they are being put into "time-out." The break is to prevent something from happening.

Tip #4: Touch and Smells

Ask everyone to let the child initiate touch and interactions. Avoid and ask others to avoid use of heavy smells such as perfumes and candles.

Tip #5: Bring Along an Activity Bag

Put together an activity bag with quiet activities that your child enjoys, like coloring books and crayons, puzzles, books.

Tip #6: Clothes don't make the kid

If your child has sensitivities to certain types of clothes, or just stubbornly insists on wearing something you (or, you suspect, your mother) will find inappropriate, don't pick a battle today. Bring change of clothes if your child must wear something you want.

Tip #7: Plan an Escape Route

If you are hosting people at your home, help your child know when and how it is OK to peel away and have some down time without offending your guests. When you are visiting friends and family, talk with the hosts and identify a quiet space where your child can "escape" when he or she is feeling overwhelmed or in need of some time alone. Also be sure to ask about any house rules (like no food in the bedrooms and no chasing the cats) that will make the visit fun for all.

Tip #8: Social Stories

Go over what will happen, it will be loud, crowded, etc. Use of social stories can be extremely helpful and give your child a head's up of what to expect.

"It is Christmas morning. Uncle Paul will bring the presents out from under the tree and hand them to all the children. The children will then open the presents. There will likely be lots of loud voices and wrapping paper flying about. If you need to take a break you can go to Aunt Susie's bedroom." Wait a minute then say again with leaving some blanks and have your fill in the important points so you know that they were listening and actually heard you. There will be lots of _____ voices..."

Tip #9: Discuss good options to deal with bothersome things.

For example: When the party gets loud, instead of hitting your sister, what is a better thing to do? Help your child to answer "Go to the quiet room or find your Mommy."

Tip #10: Heavy work

Heavy work activities before you leave home and in the car if the ride is long. Heavy work activities can be found in books such as the "Out of Sync Child" and the "Out of Sync Child has Fun."

Tip #11: Prepare others of unusual behavior by your child

If any of these things are true, you might tell them that your child:

- Sometimes doesn't get jokes
- Won't understand a sarcastic tone of voice
- Will tend to take things very literally
- May talk without pause and not notice that someone wants to take a turn to speak
- Interrupts other people because he cannot tell when his conversational partner has finished speaking
- Dislikes being hugged, touched, or stroked
- Is clumsy and doesn't like being teased about it

You could tell your guests how you wish they would act in response to these behaviors.

DURING the party:**Tip #1: Be the early bird**

Be the first, or one of the first, to arrive that way you can arrive when the house is mostly empty and your child can acclimate to the noise and chaos as it grows with each arriving guest.

Tip #2: Safe Space

Show your child the room or space that the child can start out in or retreat to during the party.

Tip #3: Remain calm

Memorize this phrase, and repeat it over and over in your head whenever you feel yourself losing your cool: "I do not have to apologize for being a good parent to my child."

Tip #4: Group photos

Get pictures done during the first half of the party before your child is tired and overwhelmed.

Tip #5: Augment the menu

Whether you're bringing a little something to somebody else's party or planning your own repast, make sure there's something your child will enjoy eating. And then don't comment if that's all he or she will eat. The goal of the day isn't cleaning your plate or trying new foods or pleasing the cook.

Tip #6: Check in

Check in with your child and look for signs of distress. Better to take a break or leave before things go bad.

Tip #6: Be the one who watches the kids

Keeping a close personal eye on your little one has a number of benefits. You can intervene in inter-child squabbles. You can assess your child's level of over stimulation and act accordingly. You can play with your child if no one else will, or lead the other children in a game your child can participate in.

Tip #7: You're Outta There!

Be the first to leave. Leave when things are still going well, right after the party's peak.

IN ADDITION, FOR PARTIES THAT YOU HOST:**Tip #1: Less is better**

Limit the number of children to the age of your child or less. If your child is 4 have 4 children total including your child

Tip #2: Time's Up!

Specify on the invitation the end time of the party and politely lead people toward the door when the party is over.

Tip #3: Outside

Whenever possible, have party outside so smells, noises, crowds can be avoided.

Tip #4: Forget the fanfare!

Sing Happy Birthday quietly and without a lot of fanfare if this is usually bothersome to your child.

Surviving Halloween, the dentist office, Santa, clowns, and other activities that entail people wear masks or costumes:

Tip #1: Wear masks and costumes around house beforehand.

Tip #2: Never force your child to wear a costume.

Tip #3: Let your child help select a costume, within reason, and depending on age.

Tip #4: Wearing a mask may be intolerable. Allow him to wear a costume and hold the mask with his hands or skip it all together.

Tip #5: If costumed, make sure it's something she can partially or fully remove on the sidewalk or at a party so she doesn't have to go home if she becomes uncomfortable.

Tip #6: Avoid sugar overload. Yes, this may be the one time of year you allow your child to fill up on candy, but don't overdo it!

Surviving the holiday season in general:

Tip #1: Don't Forget Your Routine

Don't let these routines get away from you completely, as they will be harder to re-establish once the holiday season is done.

Tip #2: Don't overbook.

Hold the festivities down to one event per holiday. Don't hop from house to house, or plan a big outing the night before a family event. Give your child (and yourself) the maximum amount of de-stressing time surrounding the minimum amount of stressful activity. This may be a disappointment to friends and family members who feel you are sheltering your child too much or rewarding difficult behavior, but you know best -- better one successful foray into the outside world than three or four really miserable ones.

Bad behavior usually means that your child is overwhelmed, anxious, or fearful.

***PREVENTING ISSUES IS ALWAYS EASIER THAN
DEALING WITH BEHAVIORS.***

