

PARTY POOPERS?

Words: Tanya Curtis

PARTIES CAN SOUND VERY EXCITING BUT ARE THEY TRULY SUPPORTIVE?

Does your child ever:

- Get stressed or anxious before or during a party?
- Have meltdowns before, during or after a party?
- Feel hurt and rejected about not being invited to a party?
- Get anxious about who to include and who not to include to their upcoming party?

Or do you as a parent dictate who can and cannot come to your child's party or what party they can and cannot attend?

If parties are so exciting why do the accompanying stress, nervousness, anxiety and meltdowns happen?

It is true, there can be a very enjoyable aspect to parties. It is fun to be with friends and giggle and laugh and just hang out.

However parties also come with aspects of life to deal with that a child does not regularly have to deal with ... that is, aspects of life they may not have the skills to know how to respond to.

For children, parties can involve:

- Separation, when we innately just want to be connected to all people
- Meeting new people
- Seeing people they know well but in a new setting (i.e. not at school)
- Watching people open a gift they would like themselves
- Giving a gift they would prefer to keep
- Playing games



- Not winning
- Social interactions
- Change in routine
- Eating foods they might not normally eat and may react to
- Rules and instructions from new and different adults
- Unstructured play
- People playing certain games differently to the way they are used to playing
- A group of excited children!

As you can see, parties come with lots of new parts of life - aspects of life that that we often need to learn skills to cope with, rather than being expected.

The key is not to withdraw from a party or to never include your child in a party; rather to come from a place of 'understanding' and use parties as a potential classroom ... a potential for your child to learn new skills to support them to feel equipped to respond to life.

Tips for supporting your child through a party:

- Prepare your child as much as possible to have

a clear picture of what is likely to happen. Tell them all you know about:

- Where you are going
- Times you are arriving and leaving
- What is likely to happen at the party
- Who might be there
- Anything you do know about the party
- If your child eats a specific diet to support their body, provide their own style of party food so they don't eat something their body is likely to react to.
- Provide a safe place and/or safe person your child can go to if they need a break or the party becomes all too consuming.
- Understand how new this is and come from a place of understanding your child, teaching, preparing and equipping them with the skills so they feel supported at all times.

But most of all:

- Teach your child how important it is just to 'be' them and not 'try' to be someone else and to enjoy being them and have fun!

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