



# Child Health Promotion

## Ideas for Food-free Celebrations in Early Care and Education Programs

Birthdays and holidays are important to families, caregivers and children. However, sending a food treat to the classroom to celebrate can exclude those children who have food allergies, diabetes, celiac disease or other dietary restrictions. In addition, our commitment to healthy eating and active living does not align with frequent sugary treats. Below are some suggestions for alternatives to food for your child's celebration. Check with your child's teacher to see what is suitable for their classroom and provide advance notice to ensure it fits into the day.

1. Buy something for the classroom your child will enjoy and be proud to share (books, games, music, class decoration, etc.).
2. Bring in special party napkins, party hats, or party favors to use with the usual school snack.
3. Decorate a shoe box and send it into the classroom. Also send note cards and have the teacher ask each child to think of something nice about the birthday child. Help kids to write it or draw a picture and put it into the box. The birthday child gets to take the box home at the end of the day. You could also do the same thing using a page or autograph book.
4. Send in an item that all children can decorate as a birthday treat for the birthday student (shirt/sweatshirt, tote bag, autograph book or page, stuffed animal, etc.).
5. Ask the teacher if you can have a show and tell time for your child on their birthday. They can make a poster, bring in some of their favorite things, bring pictures, tell the kids about their favorite things or life at their house, etc.
6. Ask the teacher if you can send in a dance song, and have the whole class do the hokey pokey, the chicken dance or whatever is your child's favorite. Invite the director!
7. Donate a plant or seed that the class could plant together and watch it grow.
8. Bring in your child's favorite book and ask the teacher to read it during story/circle time.
9. Decorate a chair as the "birthday chair" or buy a special plate and cup and designate it as the "birthday plate and cup" and the birthday child gets to sit in it or use the plate and cup on their birthday for meals and snacks.
10. Take a "trip around the sun" and celebrate with a traditional Montessori birthday celebration, see description here:  
<http://www.mariamontessori.com/2012/02/24/montessori-birthday-celebrations/>
11. Give the birthday child a special sticker or crown to wear at school all day.
12. Ask the birthday child how best to celebrate his/her birthday at school – giving them choice and some control is a gift in itself!

References:

1. <http://www.pcam.org/pcam/Quick%20Links/Wellness/Celebration%20ideas%20without%20food.pdf>
2. <https://www.realmomnutrition.com/10-food-free-ways-to-celebrate-school-birthdays/>

