

Ideas for Parents: Non-food Ideas for Birthday Celebrations at School

We all know that birthdays are important to every child and that kids like to celebrate with their classmates. However, sending in a food treat to the classroom to celebrate can exclude those children who have food allergies, diabetes or other dietary restrictions. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2011) allergies have increased more than 20% among American children since the mid 1990's. Many teachers will also admit that they would rather not have to deal with food in the classroom, especially cupcakes (very messy!).



If you would like an alternative to food treats for your child's birthday celebration at school, below are some suggestions. **Always check with your child's teacher first** to see what he/she finds acceptable for their classroom and be sure to provide advanced notice to make sure that they can fit the birthday plans into their schedule.

1. **Party favors** (bouncy balls, matchbox cars, erasers, tops, magnifying glasses, notepads, balloons, whistles, bubbles, etc.). You can get these at a party supply store, dollar store, dollar shelves at stores like Target and Michaels and catalogs like Oriental Trading Company.
2. Come into the classroom and **read a book** to the class.
3. **Buy something for the classroom** (books, games, music, class pet such as fish or turtle, plant, etc.).
4. **Decorate a box** and send it into the classroom. Also send index cards or smaller pieces of paper. Have the teacher ask each child to use one sentence to write something nice about the birthday kid and put it into the box. The birthday kid gets to take the box home at the end of the day. You could also do the same thing using an autograph book.
5. Send in supplies and directions for a **craft** for the kids to do instead of eating a snack. It is a bonus if the parent comes in to help with the craft.
6. Arrange for the kids to **play a game** instead of eating a snack. If you don't have any ideas, talk to your child's teacher. They are likely to know what the kids will enjoy and what will work well in the classroom setting. Again, it is a bonus if the parent comes in to play games with the kids.
7. Ask the teacher for **extra recess** in honor of your kid's birthday. If they are willing to take the time to eat a snack, they may be willing to use that time to let the kids play.
8. Bring in something that all the **kids can sign** as a birthday treat for the birthday kid (shirt/sweatshirt, tote bag, autograph stuffed animal, pillow case, etc.).
9. Arrange a **treasure hunt** around the classroom for the kids. There can be a special treat (see #1 or #3 for ideas) at the end. You can even use a theme that ties into what they are learning in class.
10. 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.
11. **Sponsor a child** overseas and ask the kids to write to the child. You can bring in things to teach the kids something about the child you have chosen to sponsor, including information about where they live, what kind of games kids there like to play, etc. Continue to provide information to the class about the sponsored child throughout the school year.
12. Have the kids work on a **community service project** together. There are many websites with great ideas (examples: <http://www.kidactivities.net/post/Community-Service-Ideas-for-Kids.aspx>). One idea would be having each kid write a letter to someone in the military serving overseas. You could also provide supplies for the kids to make things to donate to a charity.
13. Ask the teacher if you can send in a dance song, and have the whole class do the hokey pokey, the chicken dance, or the booty slide, whatever is your child's favorite! Invite the nurse or principal!

Compiled by Megan Palovchik, parent of a student with food allergies at Hilliard Crossing Elementary School, Hilliard Ohio. Thanks Megan, for sharing!