

## Creating a Sensory-Friendly Party

A simple, practical guide for parents and caregivers of autistic children

### Why this matters

For many autistic children, typical parties can feel overwhelming. Too loud, too bright, too unpredictable.

A sensory-friendly setup helps children:

- Feel safe and comfortable
- Participate in ways that work for them
- Stay calm, focused, and engaged

When kids have some control over their environment, you often see better attention and less distress.

### 1. Set up the environment

#### Use calming colors (what that actually means)

Not all colors feel the same to the nervous system.

#### Good options:

- Soft blues (sky blue, dusty blue)
- Muted greens (sage, olive)
- Warm neutrals (beige, tan, cream)
- Soft pastels (light lavender, pale peach)

#### Try to avoid:

- Neon or very bright colors
- High-contrast patterns (busy prints, flashing visuals)

You don't need to redecorate everything. Even small choices (tablecloths, balloons, lighting tone) can help.



## Manage lighting and sound (simple, effective strategies)

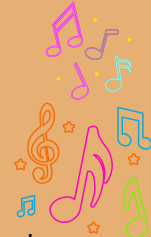
### Lighting:

- Use natural light when possible
- Swap harsh overhead lights for lamps or softer bulbs
- Avoid flickering or strobe effects
- Offer sunglasses or hats if needed

### Sound:

- Keep background music low or off
- Avoid overlapping sounds (music + toys + chatter)
- Provide noise-canceling headphones or earplugs
- Choose quieter toys and activities

**Tip:** If it feels loud or bright to you, it may feel overwhelming to a child.



## Create a quiet “chill-out” space

This is one of the most important parts.

### It can be:

- A separate room
- A tent or small corner
- A low-stimulation area

### Include:

- Soft seating (bean bags, cushions)
- Dim lighting
- Fidgets or calming toys
- Headphones
- Weighted lap pads

This is a **regulation space**, not a timeout.



## Be mindful of smells and textures

- Avoid strong scents (perfume, candles, sprays)
- Offer simple, familiar food options
- Keep messy play optional

Children should always be able to say no.

## Keep things predictable

- Smaller groups = less overwhelm
- Share a simple schedule ahead of time
- Keep transitions gentle and flexible

Predictability helps kids feel safer.



## 2. Offer sensory-friendly activities

The goal is choice, not pressure.

### Sensory bins (and why they help)

#### What they are:

Containers filled with materials like rice, beans, or sand.

#### Why they matter:

- Help children explore textures safely
- Improve focus and attention
- Support fine motor skills
- Encourage language and creativity
- Can be calming and repetitive

#### You can add:

- Scoops, cups, small toys
- Letters, numbers, themed objects



## Water play

- Cups, funnels, sponges, floating toys
- Optional bubbles

### Why it helps:

- Calming and repetitive
- Encourages exploration without pressure
- Supports sensory processing



## DIY slime & playdough (safe, simple recipes)

### 2-ingredient slime (taste-safe version)

- Cornstarch
- Water

Mix slowly until it becomes stretchy (not too runny).

Optional: add food coloring.



### Basic playdough (no-cook)

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water
- 1 tbs oil

Mix until soft and moldable.

Optional: add food coloring or mild scent.



### Yogurt + cornstarch "slime" (edible-friendly)

- Plain yogurt
- Cornstarch

Mix until thick and stretchy.

**Tip:** Skip strong scents or glitter if your child is sensitive.



## Keep activities flexible

- No forced participation
- Kids can move freely between stations
- Watching is also participating



### 3. Support interaction and comfort

#### Set expectations ahead of time

##### Let guests know:

- This is a sensory-friendly event
- Quiet voices and gentle play are encouraged
- Breaks are okay
- Leaving early is okay



#### Respect boundaries

- No pressure to touch or join
- Respect personal space
- Offer alternatives

##### Example:

A child can watch instead of participate.



#### Encourage families to bring supports

- Headphones
- Favorite snacks
- Comfort items
- Fidgets

Familiar tools help with regulation.



#### Share helpful details in advance

##### Include:

- Schedule
- Location layout
- Parking and bathrooms

This reduces uncertainty for both kids and parents.



## 4. How to create a sensory-friendly space at home

You don't need a full redesign.  
Start small:

- Create a low-stimulation corner (soft lighting, minimal noise)
- Use lamps instead of harsh overhead lights
- Keep a bin of sensory tools (fidgets, textures, headphones)
- Offer predictable routines
- Reduce background noise when possible

Think of it as giving your child a place to reset.



## 5. If others are helping (hosts, staff, family)

- Make sure they understand:
  - Some children need breaks or space
  - Sensory overload is real, not behavior
  - Flexibility matters more than strict plans

### A quick reminder

A successful sensory-friendly party does not mean:

- Every child participates
- Everything goes perfectly

It means:

- Children feel safe
- Families feel welcome
- There is room for different needs

### You are not "making it easier"

You are making it possible for your child to enjoy themselves in a way that feels safe, comfortable, and real.

