



## The ABCs for a Safe Valentine's Day Party!

**A Attend** the party. Classroom parties are riskier activities for children who have food allergies and there will always be a parent or two who “didn’t get the memo” My son was enrolled in a peanut-free pre-school where one mom brought full-sized Snickers bar for each of the kids!

**B BYOT!** Bring-Your-Own-Treat or better yet, bring a snack that will be served to all of the class. Even if another parent promises to purchase the “safe” brand of cookie or candy, there are a million ways that the parent can end up at school with a different brand or a different version of the food.

If Valentine Candy is allowed, be sure to bring a few safe pieces for your child just in case. Remember that mini-versions of the same candy can have *different ingredients*.

**C Communicate** Make sure your child’s teacher understands the extent of your child’s allergies. The classroom is a learning environment first and foremost, and should not be contaminated with traces of food if they will endanger your child. When party planning, consider the special dietary needs of all of the children including gluten and casein free diets, diabetes and more. Even with multiple food allergies and restrictions, there are a wide variety of snacks and treats that can be served to all kids safely.

**D Determine** which foods are safe for your child, **document** this for the party planners, and always **double-check** the day of the party. I thought lemonade was a drink that would *always* be safe for my son but was glad I was there when another mom brought in Kiwi-Lemonade!

**E Exchange** candy treat bags for “trinket bags” filled with non-edible prizes. Your school should be in compliance with the Wellness Initiative and candy is a food with minimal nutritional value. An allergic child with unsafe candy on the school bus is a dangerous situation that is easily avoided. There are plenty of fun non-edible treats for goodie bags or Valentine boxes.

If your child does come home with a Valentine box full of unsafe candy, trade her for a special toy, or even money. You can “pay” (trade) by the piece or by the box, whichever feels like more fun! You can also trade for some healthier options like Fruitabu or nut-free, dye-free Pure Fun candies.

**F First Served** Especially if there will be unsafe foods in the classroom, serve the children with special dietary needs or food allergies first, with clean utensils. Label drinks or drink cups if the kids will be leaving their seats so there is no confusion.

**G Gratitude** Always find ways to express your gratitude to the teachers, and other parents. Write thank you notes and/or volunteer; even a quick call or email lets them know that you appreciate them. When you pave the way with goodwill, you will increase the odds of cooperation in the future!

*Thanks to Gina Clowes from Allergy Moms for providing these useful tips!*