Traditions in India at Podar Jumbo Kids
by Swati Popat Vats

1. A tradition created to give significance to milestones —

Birthday ritual at Podar Jumbo Kids

A child’s birthday is, indeed, an occasion to celebrate… a special day that comes only once in a year. And loving parents want to make it a truly memorable experience for their child. Birthdays are also a unique opportunity to develop skills in children. Either we can teach kids that birthdays are only about cakes, parties, and gifts or we can teach them that birthdays are about sharing, caring, and friends. At Podar Jumbo Kids, we have a unique birthday policy, which converts the rituals of a common situation to a teachable moment:

1. We belong to a nation of ‘Tiger Moms.’ There was too much competition between parents to get the best cake and the biggest and costliest return gifts; so we thought it’s best to draw a line!

2. Too much of sugar and salt in the birthday treats are not good for children, so we decided against such treats in our schools.

3. Children are growing up with the wrong concept of birthdays, so why not have fun with life skills, too? After all, these are the foundation years.

Birthdays at Podar Jumbo Kids are about making the child feel special with his or her family and friends. And the cake or the return gift will not play any part in making the child feel special. It will be a celebration about 'Me and my special day.'

1. So the birthday child can come dressed in whatever makes the child happy!

2. We all know that food plays an important role in the growth of children and so we decided: no cakes, no chocolates, and no sweets; only fresh cut fruit can be served.

3. And yes, for return gifts, only books allowed. Also, the budget for the book cannot be more than Rs. 100 and the book to be approved by the teacher a week prior to the birthday.

4. And yes, we will now have a unique birthday ritual called the Birthday Walk, which is based on Maria Montessori’s concept.
5. Parents must join in the celebration at school.

6. Parents to bring along photos of the child from birth to show during the description of the birthday ritual.

**Birthday Ritual — Relating the Earth's Rotation to the Passage of Time.**
*(Of course the teacher will simplify and make it fun as per the age of the child)*

In the Montessori classroom children have the opportunity to celebrate their birthdays by doing the 'Birthday Walk.' It is a meaningful way to further their understanding of the passage of time and a great way to introduce the concept of months, days of the month, concept of a year, the earth, the sun, and how the earth revolves around the sun. The aim of this birthday ritual is to help children recognize how they have grown and changed since they were born, to help them understand why they have turned a year older, and to foster a sense of community and celebration in the classroom environment.

During circle time an item such as a candle or yellow ball is placed in the center of the circle to represent 'The Sun' in our Universe. The birthday child is invited to carefully hold the globe and the teacher explains to the children that the Earth orbits around the sun and one rotation around the sun takes one year. Essentially, the child's walk represents the Earth revolving around the Sun and another year that has passed. At the beginning the students are told that the birthday child is waiting to be born and on his birthday, he begins to walk slowly around the “Sun” carrying the globe. The child walks around the Sun once while the students sing the song:

**The Earth Goes Round the Sun**
*(Tune: Farmer in the Dell)*

The Earth goes round the Sun,
The Earth goes round the Sun,
It takes a whole year for the Earth to go round the Sun.

After the child has walked once around “The Sun,” the teacher explains that now the child is one year old; everyone claps once and you show the picture of that child when he or she was one year old. The birthday child/the parents talk about his or her picture and discuss what he or she may have done when they were one year old, i.e., say “mama,” learn to walk, drink from a bottle, or similar milestone. Each time the child walks around “The Sun” all sing the song, then discuss the age of the child and show the corresponding photo. When you get to the child's current age, everyone sings the 'Happy Birthday' song and the child blows out the candle (if used) and make a birthday wish. It is a lovely ritual and it makes the birthday child feel valued and special!

Thus making birthday celebrations a socio-emotional experience for kids rather than a materialistic experience.
2. A tradition created to honour values — A silent hug for visitors

In our country, India, child sexual abuse is at its highest. And so we want children to learn that when they meet a stranger, instead of shaking their hands or giving them a hug, we give strangers a ‘silent hug’ by crossing our arms across our chest as we hug ourselves. In this way our children avoid physical contact with strangers.

3. A tradition created to honour values — A cooking and recipe celebration

At Podar Jumbo Kids, we have a cooking and recipe celebration where the child’s father has to come to school and cook with his child, but select a recipe of one of the grandparents.

In this way we encourage community building by involving Dads, who in India, are not usually involved in school activities or even in day-to-day care of the child.

We insist that they use grandparent’s recipes so that old cultural recipes are brought back into the food habits of the child and the family.