

I'm Going to The Maplewood End of Winter Festival

A Social Story of
Winter Fun, Community, and Belonging

By
 **Together
We Bloom**
CONNECTION • COMMUNICATION • COMMUNITY

About Social Stories (A Note for the Grown-ups)

Social Stories are first-person narratives written to introduce a new, unexpected, or challenging situation with simple language and pictures. They help the reader know what to expect and provide options for support.

Anyone can benefit from learning about situations ahead of time, but social stories are often particularly helpful for neurodivergent individuals including Autistic people or people with anxiety.

Social stories should be used as a tool to empower and support inclusion and access, not to force compliance with social norms. See the end of the book for more tips on using social stories.

This End of Winter Festival Social Story was created by Together We Bloom. We are also hosting the sensory-friendly quiet room located inside DeHart Community Center, 120 Burnett Ave, Maplewood. We believe community celebrations will be better for all of us when we prioritize accessibility and expand inclusivity of our disabled neighbors.

Together We Bloom is a local 501(c)3 nonprofit with a mission to empower young children with disabilities and their families through equitable access to connection, communication, and community. We advance this mission through two vital strategies: sliding-scale, neurodiversity-affirming speech and language therapy and disability justice, equity, and belonging initiatives to make our community a more inclusive place.

To learn more or support our work for inclusion please visit: www.TogetherWeBloom.org

I am going to an event in my community called The End of Winter Festival. I will go with my grown-up/parent/family/friends.



This event is a celebration of wintertime activities and our community.

The End of Winter Festival is at DeHart Park in Maplewood, New Jersey.

There are many activities both outside in the park and inside the community center.
I can choose what I want to do.



I should bring my coat and winter clothes in case I want to be outside.

Outside, there is ice skating. If I want to skate, a grown up must sign up online for a time so everyone gets a turn.



I can bring my own skates or borrow some. The skating rink is very slippery and the skates help me glide around. I can ask for help if I feel unsteady.



Outside, there are also fire pits. Some people like to stand near the fire to keep warm. But I can't touch the fire, it's not safe



In the outside space, there is also a DJ playing loud music.

Inside the DeHart community center, there are tables to do arts and crafts and a face painter.



If I want to get my face painted, I will need to wait until it is my turn. I can pick out what design I want: an animal, a superhero, or something else I like.



I can choose to get paint on my face, cheek or my hand.

The paint brush feels wet and a little tickly. I can say “stop” if I don’t like it.

There is hot coccoa and snacks if I'm hungry or thirsty. I can bring my own drinks and snacks too.



There are lots of people who come to the End of Winter Celebration.



Some people do crafts and go skating. Some people jump and flap their hands. Some people talk and laugh. Some people walk around. Some people sit or take a break from the activity.



I can choose to do whatever feels right for me and my body!

There is a lot going on at the Festival! I might feel excited, happy, overwhelmed, or another feeling or many feelings at once. I can always tell my grown-up how I'm feeling.



If being around all the people feels too loud or overwhelming, I can take a break.

Everybody's body and brain are different.
I can listen to what my body and brain need.



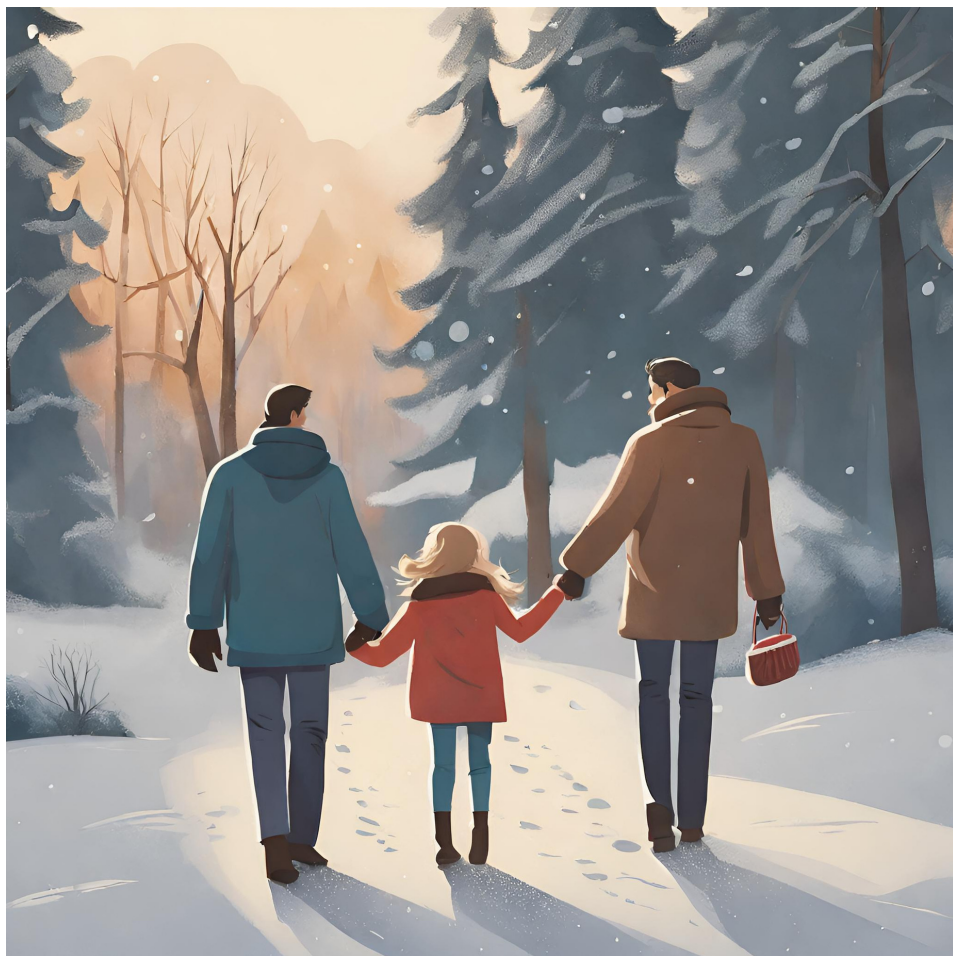
If I need a quiet, calming space, I can take a break at the sensory-friendly quiet room inside DeHart Community Center. In the sensory-friendly room, there is no music. There are soft lights, a cozy tent, and some sensory toys and books.



If I need to move my body or run around, I can take a break at DeHart Playground. There are swings, slides, and climbers.



I can stay at the End of Winter Festival for as long as I want and go home when I feel ready.



I am an important part of my community.

**Winter Fun and Community are for everyone!
Maplewood is for everyone!**








Special thanks to the Maplewood Township Department of Community Services for partnering with Together We Bloom to increase disability inclusion for this community event.

We believe that our community will be richer and more just by embracing our neurodiversity, celebrating our difference, and prioritizing belonging and equity for individuals with disabilities.



To learn more about our values and our work in the community, please visit:
www.TogetherWeBloom.org

Please stay in touch!

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Together We Bloom is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Social Story Suggestions and Supports for Parents and Caregivers

Social stories can be a wonderful tool to support your child's access to this community event, but YOU are their most important support. Here are some suggestions for supporting your child's communication and regulation at this community event.

- Introduce the social story in advance and offer the book frequently to support their understanding and processing, even if you're not sure your child understands yet.
- Feel free to adjust the words to fit your child's language level, interests, or specific needs.
- Consider that your child may not yet be able to ask for a break (with or without words); many young children need adult support to know when to take a break or how to take a break.
- Be prepared to notice your child's nonverbal communication, which may express that they may be getting dysregulated and need a break. Notice your own regulation needs, too, because "you can't pour from an empty cup."
- Use the communication board on the next page as a visual support for understanding. Try pointing to the pictures on the board as you read the social story and make comments during the event. *A child should never be required to point to the board, but we can model and provide opportunity.*
- Talk with your child about how we all have different brains and bodies so it's ok if their experience or the way they act is different than other people. We should have discussions about disabilities and neurodivergence even if your child is non-disabled or neurotypical. Disability is an important and beautiful part of human diversity!
- If you are seeking support, empowerment, and connection as a caregiver of a child with disabilities, consider joining the SOMA Peer Support and Action Network group on Facebook.

Kim Takacs, MS, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
Executive Director, Together We Bloom

End of Winter Festival Communication Board

 this is fun	 I need a break	 Let's go home	 that	 it	 you	 I
 walk	 ice skate	 sit	 stop	 go	 want	 is
 run	 eat	 make	 help	 come	 like	 what
 crafts	 fire	 sensory quiet room	 see	 play	 do	 where
 face paint	 ice skates	 outside	 inside	 on	 off	 yes
 hot cocoa	 bathroom	 different	 loud	 down	 up	 no
 "cold"	 hungry	 thirsty	 hurt	 good	 all done	 more