

November 9, 2023

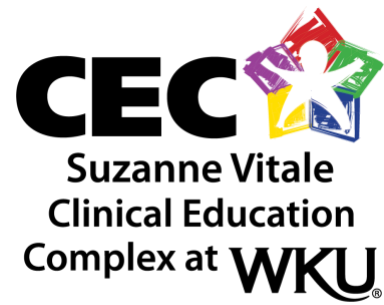
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### **Be Our Guest**

Halloween is often considered one of the best days of the year for children, but it can be a challenging holiday for some children with delays, disabilities, or learning differences. Mobility challenges, sensory preferences, social anxiety, communication needs, and dietary restrictions are just a few of the reasons that Halloween can be a less than enjoyable experience for some children and their families. The CEC team recognized this fact and worked together to plan and host a sensory friendly tea party at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex on Friday, October 27.

This tea party was designed to be inclusive for all participants. Each child's family was given the opportunity to communicate specific sensory needs or preferences prior to the tea party to make certain everyone was safe and comfortable. The party was held inside the Renshaw Early Childhood Center due to the classroom being a well-lit and familiar location for the young participants. All the adults in the room used soft voices, and a visual schedule was utilized to help the children transition successfully between activities. Mallory Hudson, Miss Kentucky 2023, was present, and she read a Disney story book to the children. Mallory then invited Disney inspired characters to join the tea party. The children had the opportunity to have a meet and greet with Disney characters, Mirabel, Elsa, Anna, and Woody. The children were then treated to a live vocal performance by Grace Schaeffer. While Grace was singing Disney songs the children were given colorful scarves to highlight the flowing melody of the songs. The swaying scarves along with the music encouraged self-regulation. It was then time for the actual tea party. The children were thrilled to be offered "tea" (diluted apple juice) and the famous Riley's Bakery tea cookies. The real glass teapot made everyone think of Mrs. Potts from *Beauty and the Beast*. After snack time it was time to decorate personalized crowns. In addition, the children had the opportunity to have their faces or hands painted by Miss Kentucky Teen, Sophia Todd. Sophia is an artist, and all the children enjoyed Sophia's beautiful art. Each child was given a balloon and scarf to take home as a memento of the fun event. Parents and caregivers were also treated to cider and cookies in the CEC's classroom, and they were able to watch a live stream of the tea party in the classroom.

The inaugural sensory friendly tea party was a wonderful collaboration between the CEC's Big Red School team, Speech Language Intervention Program, and Family Resource Program. The tea party provided contextualized language intervention in an extremely fun and flexible way. Kudos to the CEC team members for working together for the children to create a welcoming atmosphere



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with appropriate accommodations. This teamwork ensured young children affiliated with the CEC had an October event to attend that created positive emotional memories around a social gathering.