



# Speech-Language Pathology

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## The Art of the Play Date

Sometimes children play well by themselves but have difficulty learning to play with other children their age. The child may have his/her own plan and be afraid another child will upset this plan. At school or a play group, the large number of children available may be very overwhelming. Children with language, social / pragmatic, sensory processing, and/or autism spectrum disorders sometimes have great difficulty learning how to play with other children. Parents can help their children learn to play successfully with others by having “play dates” with a peer. Below are some ways you can create successful play dates for your child:

Choosing the right friend: Play partners can be siblings, children from the neighborhood, or classmates. If you do not know the child, ask your child's teacher or other parents for recommendations.

- Choose a child that has interests that are similar to your child, or enjoys the same activities.
- Choose a child that is flexible and able to take turns being the leader in play activities.
- Be sure that the age of the friend compliments your child's needs—A slightly younger peer may be at an equal play level with your child, while a slightly older peer may be able to act as a “play mentor” to your child. There should not be too much of an age difference in either direction between your child and the friend.
- Begin with one friend. When the child is able to play successfully with this person with a variety of activities, another peer can be added.

### Creating the Right Environment:

- Choose a place that is familiar and comfortable to your child. While your home may be the most obvious choice, other locations may be appropriate, as well (e.g. playground, park, beach, etc.)
- Limit distractions by removing other toys or moving to an area that is less crowded.
- Ensure that the choices of play materials are ones that your child likes and materials that he/she already knows how to play with.
- For each segment of play, allow your child or his/her guest to choose from only 2-3 sets of materials. Once the choice is made, remove all other materials from the area. This will help your child to play more closely with his/her friend

### Organizing the Play Date for Success!

- Prepare your child for the play date, by reviewing rules, expectations, and materials with him/her
- Structure the play date to allow for snack or movement breaks.
- Keep the expectations clear and visual (a visual clock can be used to show your child how long he/she will play before the next break). Use short segments of time (e.g. 5-10 minutes) at first. Once your child is successful, gradually increase the time for each play segment.
- Introduce either new materials or new peers (not both at the same time). Prepare your child for changes by allowing him/her to choose materials or peers.
- Once your child becomes more comfortable with peer play in a quiet and familiar setting, attempt to expand to more distracting or unfamiliar settings or settings where there is less adult support.