

LADC Behavior Handout



Setting Up Play Dates

Learn how to create opportunities for your child to play with other children outside of school

Helping your Child Spend More Time with Children



As the summer months approach, it is important to think about how to help facilitate some social interactions between your child and other peers throughout the summer to continue their development. Play dates are also extremely important as it is a way your child will continue to improve their social-emotional skills throughout early childhood.

Benefits of Play Dates

- Social Interaction
- Develop problem solving skills
- Learning opportunities
- New experiences/flexibility
- Emotional growth
- Learn about playing together/sharing
- Sparks creativity and imagination
- Improves attention span
- Practice waiting/taking turns

Alternative Peer Interactions

If you are having a hard time finding children for your child to play with outside of school, you can try for public places like libraries, the zoo, playgrounds, or beaches. Make sure that if you are going to utilize a public place to help your child get social interaction, it is important that you are close to supervise and intervene if necessary. Do not expect your child to play independently.

How to Find Children for Playdates

There are a couple of different ways to find appropriate peers for your child to play with. First, you can start with your school. Are there any children that the teachers say your child gets along well with or spends a majority of their time playing with? Maybe there are some parents that you have gotten to know over the year that you wouldn't mind asking to have their child come over. Additionally, you could look within your family. Are there any cousins that would be appropriate or maybe your family members know of some other children. Next, you could look in your neighborhood for some children who are around your child's age or you could look at your church to find some peers for play dates.

Ideally you want to find a child who is within one year of your child's age and is generally a pleasant, cooperative, and engaging child. Gender should not matter when selecting the peer. Instead, find someone your child shows interest in.

Location for Playdate

Public Place

Sometimes children aren't ready yet for a playdate at someone's house, so it can be helpful to schedule an outing between the two families in a public place. This can help to decrease the pressure on your child if they are anxious to meet new people and then either family can leave if it becomes challenging.

Your House

When beginning playdates with a new friend. Invite the child's parent to stay over at your house and chat off to the side. This will help to provide support should the playdate have some challenges.

Length of Time for Playdate

It is always helpful to set a time limit for the playdate. If you are hosting, make a fixed start and finish to the play date. This will help the playdate be successful and reduce conflict. Initially, it may be beneficial to start with just 1 hour. This is long enough to benefit from the social interaction but not too long that your child will get bored or cause conflict. As your child begins to have success, you can increase the length of time. Make sure take into account the best time of day with naps and mealtimes.

Plan a Structured Activity

It can be helpful to have one structured activity planned that the children might engage in during the playdate. This can be a great way to help get the children involved with each other. Then the goal would be that they would begin to engage in unstructured free play following the activity. Children can be nervous or shy at the beginning of a playdate; therefore, a structured activity can ease the transition.

Snack

Make sure to provide a snack during the playdate or bring a snack if you are getting together out in public. Children are more likely to have challenging behaviors if they are hungry or thirsty. If you are hosting the playdate at your house, make sure to find out if the child has any allergies.

Talk to Your Child Ahead of Time

It can be helpful to have a conversation with your child ahead of time about the friend that is coming over. You may allow your child to set aside one toy (their favorite toy) that might be hard to share that day. Remind them that for future playdates, they may need to practice sharing that item. By allowing your child to put a toy away that is special to them, you may help to avoid conflicts over sharing. Talk ahead of time about taking turns and allowing others to play with their toys. You might also choose to remove some toys that are difficult to play together with other children or often lead to aggressive actions (e.g. pretend weapons).

Playdate Ideas

- Indoor camping
- Crafts
- Dress-up
- Indoor fort
- Fun in the kitchen
- Alphabet Scavenger Hunt
- Hopscotch in the hallway
- Play like the floor is lava
- Build obstacle courses
- Balloon toss
- Freeze dance
- Play/build with cardboard boxes
- Water balloon stomp
- Tea Party

Parallel Play

Sometimes the children may not be engaging in cooperative play on the playdates. Parallel play is an important part of development and depending on your child's age, that may be all they can do. A child may also fluctuate between cooperative play and parallel play throughout the play date.

Handling Conflict

If a conflict arises during the playdate, there are a couple of options on how to handle the situation.

- 1) You can try to help the children solve the problem by identifying the challenge and coming up with some solutions
- 2) You can have the children play in separate play areas for a little bit to calm down before rejoining to play together
- 3) You can suggest a new activity and help them get started with that activity
- 4) You can call the child's parents to pick up early if the above solutions aren't working. It's okay to end before it gets worse and try again.

Supervision

It is your responsibility to provide supervision, whether you are hosting the playdate or joining a family in public for an activity. So many challenging behaviors can be prevented by having an adult present. You may not even need to step in to help but just your presence helps children to make better choices. If you aren't providing close supervision, you also need to be aware that other parents may discipline your child or provide correcting statements if they are displaying inappropriate behavior. Don't just sit back during the playdates and view it as a break because if things don't go well, opportunities for playdates with that family may be done.