

Tips for Parents: Planning a playdate!

Things to consider:

- Time of day for your child/you/siblings: choose the best time to support behaviour
- Consider arranging for siblings to be out of the house if able
- First date: keep it short and sweet (e.g., plan one activity of interest to both children and a snack)
- Accept that your child may be playing in the same place with the other child vs. interacting during play at first).
- Later dates: can be longer and include more activities
- Consider whether you should have the playdate in your own home or someone else's home? Sometimes it's easier in your own home but for some children it is easier to go out because they don't have to worry about sharing their things.
- Remember to always end on a high note. Longer is not better – need to make sure to end the playdate when both children still want more. (Give warnings that the playdate is about to end and it will be time for you/the friend to go home)
- Sharing system: As adults, we put things away that we don't want other people to see or touch. Your child needs this as well. Consider getting a basket or box that can be used as a visual strategy to teach your child this. The "just for me" toys can be put away before the playdate and stored in the parents' room.

Tips to Prepare your Child for the Playdate:

- Talk about who is coming over and what will happen. Put it on paper.
- Refer to www.thegraycenter.com for more information on how to write a personal story. Also www.connectability.ca/2010/09/23/creating-personal-stories/
- Some guidelines for writing a personal story:
 - 1) The focus of the story should be positive,
 - 2) Written from the child's perspective,
 - 3) Talk about one idea that child can do and talk about how other people will feel.

EXAMPLE OF A PERSONAL STORY:

- Page 1: I Can Play With David (draw or insert a picture on each page)
- Page 2: It can be fun to play with friends. Sometimes I go to my friend's house, and sometimes my friends come to my house. Tomorrow, David is coming to my house.
- Page 3: We will be decorating cookies to eat for a snack. After that, we can play with some of my toys.

- Page 4: I can try to _____ (*insert something that is challenging for your child e.g., “wait my turn”, “listen to David’s ideas” etc.*). David will feel happy at my house when I wait my turn.

Tips for Parents – What do I do during my child’s playdate?

- Be an “active bystander” **Watch and listen to the kids so that you know when they need you to step in and coach.** (This should be faded as children get older and develop better play and social skills)
- Help your child understand what the other child might be thinking based on his or her actions (e.g., “I don’t think David wants to play with the ball. He keeps pushing it away).
- Help your child understand that the friend has different interests, thoughts and feelings “*YOU love popcorn, but David LOVES cookies. He doesn’t like popcorn so he doesn’t want to eat any and that’s OK.*”
- Help your child direct language to the other child (Great idea! Let’s tell David.)
- Only give as much help as needed and gradually add more if necessary
- Position yourself behind, rather than between, the children
- Use actions rather than words to help whenever you can
- Watch out for emerging conflicts and problem solve ahead of time UNLESS negotiation is your goal
- Pay attention to the “rhythm” of the playdate and help the kids move along as needed (getting bored, need to play alone, want to do some physical play, need a snack, need to end)

References

Barry, T., Klinger, L.G., Lee, J., Palardy, N., Gilmore, T. and Bodin, S.D. (2003) . Examining the effectiveness of an outpatient clinic-based social skills group for high-functioning children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 33 (6) 685-701

Jull, S. and Mirenda, P. (2011). Parents and play date facilitators for preschoolers with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*. 13(1), 17-30
Schuler, A. and Wolfberg, P. (2000). Promoting peer play and socialization: The art of scaffolding. In Wetherby, A. and Prizant, B. (Eds.) *Autism spectrum disorders: A transactional developmental perspective*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company

Smith, M.J. (2001). *Teaching Playskills to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. New York: DRL Books Inc.

Sussman, F. (2006) *TalkAbility : Helping Parents Promote Communication and Social Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Toronto: Hanen Centre

Sussman, F. (2010) *Making Hanen Happen: Leader's Guide for TalkAbility The Hanen Program for Parents of Verbal Children on the Autism Spectrum Leader's Guide*. Toronto: Hanen Centre