



# Handy Handouts®

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## Let's Play! Tips for Organizing Play Time for Young Children

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Playing and learning go hand-in-hand, as play provides a natural context for children to practice and reinforce essential skills. Children learn a wide variety of skills during play including cognitive, physical, language, social, and literacy skills. Parents can help facilitate play and learning by arranging playdates for their children. Here are some tips to help your child's next playdate go smoothly.



• **Set your child up for success.**

When arranging a playdate, carefully consider the characteristics of a potential playmate, ensuring that the playmate is around the same age as your child and has similar interests. As children become older, they can select classmates or peers that they wish to play with. Additionally, it is beneficial to schedule playdates around your child's sleeping and eating routines.



• **Practice difficult skills.** Review expectations of behavior and practice skills that may be difficult for your child. For example, if your child struggles with sharing, roleplay how to share prior to the playdate.



• **Provide structure.** Be sure to set a time limit for the playdate that is appropriate for your child. Make a list of activities, and allow children to take turns choosing ones they will enjoy. Choose activities or toys that promote social interaction and cognitive development, such as board games, puppets or blocks. You may also include toys that encourage pretend play, such as dolls, racecars, action figures, etc.



• **Review the rules.** Children succeed when they know what is expected of them. Review the rules with all children prior to playtime: behavioral expectations (e.g., no running in the house) and social expectations (e.g., take turns when playing with blocks).



• **Plan a snack break.** Try to include a snack or cooking activity. This is a great way to practice following directions, sequencing, asking/answering questions, turn taking, and social skills.



• **Get moving.** Incorporate physical activities during playdates. Go to a playground or park, or allow children to play in the yard under adult supervision.



• **Let children play.** At first, children may need a bit of adult support for a playdate. However, as they become more confident and comfortable, slowly fade adult support and allow them the opportunity to lead their playdate.

Remember that playdates can be fun for both children and parents. Helping your child develop appropriate play skills is critical to social development and sets your child up for success.

Resources:

Bongiorno, L. (n.d.). 10 things every parent should know about play. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from NAEYC for families website: <http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/10-things-every-parent-should-know-about-play>

Guidelines for structured play dates with socially-challenged preschoolers [Pamphlet]. (2012). Linguisticsystems.

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