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# Making the Most of Play Dates for Children on the Spectrum



Dear Triumph ABA Parents,

Play dates are more than just a way to fill an afternoon—they're powerful opportunities for children to learn essential social and communication skills in a natural, fun setting. For children on the autism spectrum, play dates can support the development of turn-taking, flexible thinking, sharing, emotional regulation, and language skills. That said, play dates can also be intimidating—for both the child and the parent.

The key to a successful play date? Preparation, support, and setting realistic expectations. In this month's newsletter, we'll guide you

through how to make play dates productive and enjoyable for your child. From selecting the right playmate and environment, to choosing structured activities and knowing when to take breaks, we'll help set the stage for meaningful social growth.

With the right tools and a little planning, play dates can be a wonderful way to build confidence, foster friendships, and have fun along the way!





## Tips for Supporting Successful Play Dates

1

**Choose the Right Playmate:** Start with children who are patient, kind, and open to structured play. Consider inviting classmates or neighbors your child already has some familiarity with.

2

**Keep it Short and Sweet:** For first-time play dates, limit the time to 30–60 minutes. Ending on a positive note helps build excitement and confidence for future interactions.

3

**Set Up Structured Activities:** Use games or toys with clear rules (e.g., puzzles, building blocks, simple turn-taking games) to guide the interaction and minimize chaos.

4

**Model and Coach:** Be nearby to model language or help with social cues (e.g., “Say, ‘Can I have a turn?’” or “Let’s clean up together”). Fading your involvement over time allows for greater independence.

5

**Plan for Downtime:** Have a quiet corner or favorite sensory tool ready in case your child becomes overstimulated. Short breaks can make a big difference.

6

**Talk About It After:** Reflect with your child afterward. Use visuals or simple questions to help them recall what they enjoyed or what felt hard. Celebrate their effort!

# NEWSLETTER



TO  
CHECK  
OUT

The New  
Social Story  
Book by  
Carol Gray

Play Skills for  
Children with  
Autism Spectrum  
Disorder by Nicole  
Thomson

Friends Are  
Fun! by  
Kristen  
McCurry

The Social  
Skills Picture  
Book by Jed  
Baker

Building  
Social  
Relationships  
2 by Scott  
Bellini

Quote of the month:

**Play gives children a  
chance to practice  
what they are learning.**

- Fred Rogers



Play dates don't have to be perfect to be powerful. With preparation and patience, they can become wonderful teaching moments that build connection and confidence. Whether it's five minutes of shared play or a full hour of laughter, every moment counts.