

Dear Parents,

It's been a great beginning. The tears are now few and far between, and we are ready to begin all our routines. We are busy getting ready for the holidays, and preparing for our annual Truck Day. We not only have our usual exciting trucks, but thanks to your involvement, we have some new ones. We look forward to seeing all of our parents at our first Parents Association Brunch. Please join us as we prepare for our school year. As promised, I bring to you the next in my series of articles to help you in the difficulty journey of Parenting.

Playdates

Play dates are a great way for young children to develop their newly emerging social skills. During play dates, children learn about each others likes and dislikes and about one another's families and homes. They discover different toys and hopefully share them. I always encourage parents to make playmates for their children, especially if a child is having difficulties socializing in a larger group. Playing with just one child is much less intimidating than trying to play with the whole class. Here are some good rules of thumb that you can follow to help ensure that play dates are successful:

- ◇ Make sure play dates are one-on-one. Play dates work best when limited to two children
- ◇ Ask a teacher for suggestions. Who does your child like to play with at school? Who would be a good choice to have as a play date for your child. While it is nice to socialize with parents whose company you enjoy, remember that play dates are for the children, not the adult, and should be guided by your child and his interests.
- ◇ Don't schedule too many play dates. If your child attends school every day, a play date once or twice a week is enough. More than that is simply too exhausting for a young child. Some children will ask for a play date everyday, especially if they see another child going on a play date. As apparent, you need to exercise your judgment and curtail your child's social life if necessary. At the end of a school day, when your child asks to play with Rachel and you look at your calendar and see that the first available date is in three weeks, you know you've overdone it.
- ◇ Vary your child's play dates. It's a good idea to schedule play dates with different children. We do not recommend "steady" play dates. In my experience, children who have "steady" play dates may not only quickly tire of each other, but they might also develop negative patterns which can carry over to the classroom.
- ◇ Cancel a play date if your child is tired or not feeling well. When your child cries because you have canceled a play date, simply reassure them that you will reschedule it at a later date.

- ◇ Don't tell your child about the play date too far in advance.
- ◇ Limit the length of time for a play date. An hour and a half is a sensible amount of time for a play date. After an hour and a half, most children will lose interest and become tired and irritable.
- ◇ Be there to supervise. Young children must be watched closely when they are playing. A perfectly good interaction can quickly turn to fighting and tears without proper supervision.
- ◇ Be prepared to participate. Some children will jump right into playing together, but playing is a learned activity and should be modeled.
- ◇ Don't turn on the television or video or computer during the play date. It defeats the object of inviting another child to your home, since those activities are solitary.
- ◇ Try to keep your child's siblings otherwise engaged. Younger siblings can often be disruptive to the play date, and a sibling can be an enticement to your child's friends.
- ◇ Tell your child that he needs to follow the rules of the house wherever he goes. All children should help clean up toys in everyone's home.
- ◇ Give a warning before it is time to leave. Children are often reluctant to leave when they are having fun, and it is often tempting to let them continue playing until they tire. When young children tire, they fall apart quickly. It is better to give the children plenty of warning that a playmate is going to end so that they can make an easier transition toward leaving.
- ◇ End a play date if it starts to fall apart. It is perfectly fine to end a play date early and suggest that you plan another one when the children are not so tired.
- ◇ If the play date is at your house, suggest to your child that they put away any toys that they rather not share. This way they know that all the other toys left out are those toys that they are going to share with their friends.

Some recommended books about friendship

<i>We Are Best Friends</i>	Aliki
<i>Being Friends</i>	Karen Beaumont
<i>How to be a Friend</i>	Laurie Krasny Brown
<i>Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel</i>	Virginia Lee Burton
<i>That's What Friends Do</i>	Kathryn Cave
<i>Chester's Way</i>	Kevin Henkes
<i>Frederick</i>	Leo Lionni
<i>It's Mine</i>	Leo Lionni
<i>Frog and Toad Together</i>	Arnold Lobel
<i>George and Martha</i>	James Marshall
<i>Elmer and Wilbur</i>	David McKee
<i>Rainbow Fish</i>	Marcus Pfister
<i>Making Friends</i>	Fred Rogers
<i>The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear</i> ...	Don and Audrey Wood