



## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

### Play Dates

Families living with autism spectrum disorder often look for tips on how to handle the many different challenges that may arise. "Real Life Tips for Kids with Autism" is a series of practical videos and resources presented by the experts at Children's Specialized Hospital.

Play dates give parents the opportunity to see how their children are working in a natural environment, so it gives parents the opportunity to see where their child's strengths are and what are things they may need to work on. Playdates are excellent ways to give children the opportunity to practice their social skills, their play skills and their communication skills. Some of the social skills they can work on include sharing, taking turns and even negotiating between all the games.

Play dates are excellent ways to give parents the opportunity to see their child in a new environment and they can see where their child has strengths and what things that he or she may need to work on for the future. Play dates can also be extremely difficult for children with autism because they may not know what behavior is appropriate and what's not appropriate. Through these play dates, they can learn these skills such as sharing and taking their turns and really keeping their space so they can know what is appropriate behavior. So here are some ways to promote a positive and successful play date.

If your child needs a lot of structure, one way to promote a positive playdate is to create a visual schedule and here is an example of one schedule. So before the play date, it is important to tell your child that first we are going to draw and then we are going to play with the Legos, we are going to have a quick snack, we are going to go to the playground, then we are going to play with some playdoh and then it's time to say goodbye. Now this schedule is a great way to prepare your child for transitions.

So children with autism really love to stick to the schedule and it's important to remind them that there's always second options, there's always another way to go about things. So let's say that there is no playdoh in the house what do you do? You say, "Johnny, there's no Playdoh right now so we are going to have to go right to the snack." Another good tip is to set up stations around the room and this will allow the children to see what's coming up next so it will make for easy transitions.

You should also know how long it takes before a child tantrums so they can play appropriately, so if your child can only play for thirty minutes, that's perfectly fine. For the first play date if you only need to give ten to fifteen minutes, that gives the child time to get to know one another and feel comfortable in the same room.

One way to model behavior is to role play with your child and you can review what's appropriate behavior and what's not appropriate behavior with them so they know prior to the play date what's expected of them.

One way to prepare your child is to present a social story to them and social stories will help your child understand what to expect and how to act under certain situations.

When choosing someone to play with your child, it's important to choose a peer who is flexible and who exhibits appropriate behavior. I think that all children are able to learn from one another so if you choose someone who is a good role model for a child, they can learn from the positive behaviors.

So one way to go about certain situations, so let's say your child has a tantrum because they weren't sharing and they got really upset, so one way to go about that is to give them verbal or nonverbal cues. So one verbal cue could be "Johnny, it's ok, it's ok to share and we just have to remember to breath and relax." Non-verbal cues they should be comfortable with and they should know before the play date what certain actions mean, so you can remind them to breath by going (takes a deep breath) and that will be a mental reminder for them to relax, breath and move on with the situation.

One of the most important things to do is to reinforce the positive behavior. A reinforcer can be a treat or it can be a positive praise such as "Excellent job" , "You're doing great", "Good job." It's important to immediately praise the child because they will then know that this is good behavior and they will continue it in future play dates. Now after the play date, if the play date went well, you should provide reinforcement for them say, "You did an excellent job throughout the play date" and then you can also reflect on it and say, "Well what went well and what didn't go so well and how can we make improvements for the future."

Now play dates don't always have to be in the home. It's good to bring your kids out in the community and see certain things. So bring them to the park, bring them to the zoo, let them experience the world and they can share that together. When choosing a peer for your child to play with, you should always try to find someone who has the same interest as your child. That way they can share the same activities and have fun together. When choosing things to play with during the play date, you should try to pick neutral toys. This will avoid problematic behavior. So let's say that Johnny really loves his trains and he will not give them up and you know that he'll get upset if he sees another child playing with his trains. So the best thing to do during this situation is to hide the trains completely. You want it to be out of sight and you want to avoid all the problematic behaviors.

So as a parent of a child with autism you can to explain to the playmate that we have to play rules differently, we have to change the rules a little bit and that's ok. You need to let them know that they need to be flexible and go with the flow. I've seen kids grow so much through their experience, through the social skills groups, through these therapies and it may be a rough road and it may be difficult but you have to remember that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Every child has the ability to make friends, to create friendships and to create meaningful relationships with other people.



Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special health care needs.



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