



How to help your child play with other children

*The following are only **suggestions** will not necessarily apply to all children. Determining **if** or **how** to apply these strategies should be based on the child's age, communication skills, cognitive skills, and ability to handle frustration and anxiety. Work closely with your ASD Case Manager and/or other professionals to determine which would be appropriate.

Strategies to Help Your Child Play with their Peers

- Play simple activities or games that your child already *knows* and *enjoys* with one or two other **familiar** children
 - Activities that are **repetitive** and **predictable** where all children do the **same thing together** (e.g. singing, chanting, sliding down a slide, jumping on a trampoline, riding in a wagon or big swing, pushing trains on a track, etc.) work best
 - Vary the activity as needed to keep children interested and involved (e.g. simpler steps, more structure, more movement, different toys, etc.)
- Help your child become more comfortable observing, approaching and joining **familiar** peer(s) in typical play settings (e.g. playground, park, free play, etc.)
 - Notice which peer(s) or activities your child **watches** or is drawn to
 - Help your child gradually:
 - Play **closer** to peer(s)
 - Play for a **little bit longer** near peer(s)
 - Draw your child's attention to peer and peer's attention to your child by **commenting** on what the other is doing with enthusiasm & excitement
 - Help your child do something similar to peer(s) (e.g. an action or sound with a similar toy) during play
 - Add "**props**" (e.g. balls, cars, buckets, etc.) and "**themes**" (e.g. bowling, driving a bus, Bob the Builder, Dora the Explorer) to make activity more interesting both for your child and for peers
 - **Assign roles** to children (e.g. "you're the bus driver!"; "you're the bus engine!", etc.) so your child knows what to do and what others are doing
 - As much as possible, redirect children to focus on and interact with one another – *their tendency will be to focus on YOU*

Strategies to Help Peers Play with Your Child

- Become “buddies” with peer(s) that your child is drawn to/ interested in
- Show them simple ways to play and communicate with your child, *including how to respond **positively** to his/her “unique” and/or repetitive behaviors or interests*
- Explain why your child with ASD communicates/behaves/interacts “differently” (e.g. “He likes to spin the car wheels over and over because it makes him happy and he’s not sure how to play with you yet.”)
- Get peer “buddies” to do what you usually do with your child (e.g. pull him in a wagon, push him on a swing, give him a snack, tickle him, etc.)
- Encourage peers to figure out ways to interact and play with your child (I’m not sure how to help him play that – do you have any ideas?)
- Remind peers that your child REALLY WANTS to interact and have friends, but it’s just harder for some children. Children will usually take another child’s lack of response **personally** and give up on them quickly
- “Coach” peer(s) to read and respond to your child’s subtle attempts to communicate and interact (“Do you think he wants to play that with you? How can you tell? Did you see him smile when you started tickling him?”)
- Encourage peer(s) to persist in their efforts to play with your child (e.g. “Keep going – he really likes that game – I think he’ll come back!”)

****Keep in Mind****

- Small, gradual steps & **brief, positive social experiences with other children** are **KEY**

Additional Resources

- Koegel, Robert L., Koegel, Lynn K. (2006). Pivotal Response Treatments for Autism: Communication, Social & Academic Development. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing
- MacDonald, J., Stoika, P. (2007). Play to Talk: A Practical Guide to Help Your Late-Talking Child Join the Conversation. Madison, WI: Kiddo Publishing Co.
- Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. C., & Rydell, P. J. (2005). The SCERTS Model: A comprehensive educational approach for children with autism spectrum disorders. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Quill, K. (2000) Do-Watch-Listen-Say: Social and Communication Intervention for Children with Autism. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Wolfberg, P.J. (2003) Peer play and the autism spectrum: The art of guiding children’s socialization and imagination. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

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