

Quick Guide to: Playdates



Soon after starting school, lots of children start to want to invite a friend or friends round to play at their house or to meet at a local park. Such playdates can be an important step in gaining and practising independence, but can also be a source of anxiety for children and families alike. Here's our guide to getting it right for everybody.

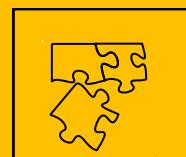
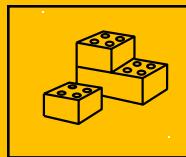
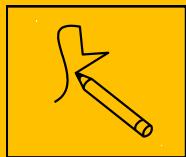
Place: All children can find new places such as other people's houses daunting. Maybe meet at a park where they are comfortable for the first playdate? If you're having the playdate at your home, make sure they know where the toilet is when they arrive and show them where they can keep their things.



Numbers: It can be easier to just have 2 children playing at a time. The dynamics of communicating in a group of 3 or more can be really difficult. Also consider siblings and how they can be occupied without getting under the feet of the children playing.



Activities: Try to find out before they come what your guest likes doing and have a few things ready. Avoid activities that rely on sharing! Showing the choices and putting them in order—along with when tea will be and when it's home time—will really help some children to relax and enjoy themselves. You could draw something on a board or use post-it notes:



Other children will prefer less structured time and will be quite happy left to their own devices to play. Just ask—families will be happy to tell you what works best.

Food: Keep it simple! Check for allergies. Lots of children prefer food where they can see what it is and to keep their each food separate on their plate. Putting the main food on plates and then letting them help themselves to vegetables can help them to keep their plate how they like it.



Timings: Keep it short and make it clear when home time will be. All children find this difficult so give clear warnings and some kind of countdown to make it easier:
“Ok We’re going to do 2 more puzzles and then your parents will be here”
“Don’t worry, when your Dad comes you can choose one more game before you go home.”
Make sure home time is early enough to allow everyone to get through their bedtime routine as usual. No-one will want to repeat a playdate that ends in a tired mess at home!

