

PARENTING SOLUTIONS
Frank Discussion about Real Parenting Challenges

Play dates: How important are play dates?

What's the best way to have a successful play date? How can we prevent and manage arguments between the kids?

What do other parents say? Depending on extra-curricular activities, many parents try and schedule one or two play dates a week for their child or children. One mom tries to split the time with a structured activity and some playtime. Another mom finds it important to let the kids play freely, either in parallel play or together. Using some quiet time has proven helpful to other moms to help the kids break out of bickering battles and regroup.

What do the pros say? Dr. Benjamin Spock says that children should be around other children of similar ages from about one year of age in order to foster social skills. Authors of *Smart Love*, William and Martha Heineman Pieper disagree; they say that prior to three years of age play dates are not very important, children of this age want your love and attention, but also want to control their environment. These younger children should not be expected to share or follow social norms (e.g. sharing).

By three and four years of age friendships with other children become important to children and they are able to empathize with others. When disputes break out during playtime, Myrna Shure (developmental psychologist and educator) suggests asking the more verbal child how he thinks the action makes the other child feel. Follow up with a question about how your child would feel if Johnny didn't want to play with him anymore, thus demonstrating to your child that his feelings are important too. As children mature, helping them recognize social expectations are important to develop social skills.

So, keep on scheduling those play dates, and be available to help the kids work out any differences that may come up. And most of all, let them have fun!