

Building Social Emotional Skills – Creating Successful Socially Distanced and Virtual Play Dates for Children with ADHD

At times, it can be challenging for a parent of a child with ADHD to help them maneuver through social situations. When things do not go well, we may feel distressed and worry about our children's social wellbeing. It may leave us feeling lost and unclear about the best way to support our children.

Learning how to engage socially can be a long process. Rather than focusing on it all at once, taking one interaction at a time allows you to break down the process and make it less overwhelming. In this way, you are providing opportunities for your children to have success engaging with their peers and supporting the development of social-emotional skills.

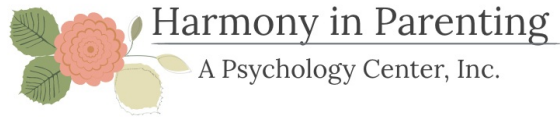
The following steps may help you support positive social experiences for children with ADHD.

Prepare for the event...

- Keep play dates short. In general, two hours or less is optimal for early elementary school aged children to begin and even less time may be best for younger children. For virtual play dates, it may be helpful to shorten the time to as little as 20 minutes. Observe how play dates go and alter the timeframe to meet the needs of your child and their guest.
- Children with ADHD tend to do well with structure. Having a schedule for the experience can be helpful. Think about how to schedule activities such as free playtime, snack time, and structured time such as a game. Notice what may be going well or is challenging and adapt the schedule to fit the situation.
- If you are comfortable, check in with the parents of the peer to see what might be helpful to know about the child before the play date or what they might find fun. Knowing a bit about what to expect may help the planning and allow you to better gear the experience.

Provide opportunity for you and your child to work together on planning, rehearsing strategies, and designing the event...

- Talk through what is going to happen with your child ahead of time. Be curious about what your child is imagining about the experience and support them in gauging what is realistic.
- Reassure your child that you are available to support them during the play date. Reflectively inquire about times that your child can imagine wanting you to be involved and what that would look like.



- Work collaboratively with your child to choose a few activities to offer their peer. Allow your child to have time alone with friends but be aware should they need some support from you. This might mean creating physical space during a socially distanced play date or being within earshot during a virtual call. Should you need to intervene, do so gently and calmly to allow for a successful outcome.

Use the experience as a positive learning opportunity...

- After the play date is over, talk through the experience with your child. Without judgment, notice with them aspects that were enjoyable. Ask about what they were feeling, thinking, and doing.
- Use all the information learned to help plan the next social experience for your child. As parents, we are constantly watching, learning, and experimenting with approaches. No two children are alike and different things work for different children.

A Helpful Perspective...

At first, it may seem like a lot of work to plan and help your child through a play date. In the long run, you are likely reducing your burden and offering an opportunity for your child to build necessary skills for positive social interactions. The opportunity for positive social connectedness supports your child's resilience, wellbeing, and success.