

Playing with Friends

Peer interaction is important to children’s learning and development. Children learn new skills by watching and interacting with other children during everyday activities. By paying close attention and responding to what children are doing while playing and interacting together, you can support and enhance their child-to-child interactions.

Learning Guide: Supporting Your Child’s Interactions with Peers

- Provide lots of opportunities for your child to interact with other children. Children’s interactions can happen during everyday activities at home, such as having friends over to play or spending the afternoon with brothers and sisters, or in the community, such as attending a playgroup or visiting a playground or park.
- When your child is together with another child, provide them opportunities to do things they both like and enjoy doing. Your child will have the most chances to interact with others when they are involved in an activity that matches their shared interests.
- Watch what your child does in the activity to see how he or she tries to start an interaction with another child, get another child’s attention, or keep the interaction going. Observe how your child communicates with actions (e.g., nodding, waving, signaling, showing something to another child) or words (e.g., saying another child’s name, asking a question, talking about what another child is doing).
- When you notice your child interacting with another child, respond promptly and positively to keep their interaction going. You might comment on or describe what your child is doing, join in the interaction, praise your child for trying to interact, or provide them the toys or materials they need for the interaction.
- Encourage your child to interact with another child in new and different ways. You might show your child how to do something different with another child, expand on what your child has said, suggest other things your child could say, or provide toys or materials that encourage the children to do something different.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

You’ll know the practice is working if ...

- Your child gets involved with other children in different activities and for longer periods of time.
- Your child enjoys playing with other children during everyday activities.
- Your child tries doing new things when interacting with other children.

A Quick Peek

Amanda invited the twins next door, Abby and Duncan, to play in the yard with her daughter, Cara. Remembering that all the children loved playing in water, she got out the hose and began filling some large plastic storage tubs. Amanda noticed that as Cara approached the tubs, she waved to Abby and Duncan. “Shall we ask them to play?” asked Amanda. “Play,” Cara called. As the twins joined in, the children began splashing the water and laughing. Amanda brought over some waterproof cups, bowls, a strainer, and other kitchen items. She showed the children how they could pour the water through the strainer and catch it in a container. She helped them hold the containers for one another. Soon all three children were enjoying helping each other pour and strain water into different containers.



For more ideas, ask an early interventionist, home visitor, teacher, therapist, or another experienced parent. [You can access helpful and fun ideas about peer interaction in “The ABCs of Toddler Playdates”](#) — a free article on the WebMD web site.