



How to Keep Your Toddler's Social Skills on Track During COVID-19

Social distancing and spending more time at home isn't just affecting adults and older children. For children ages birth to three, regular interactions with teachers, peers and non-family members is an important part of their social-emotional development. Here's the good news: While COVID-19 has put restrictions on the social interactions we're used to, there are still plenty of ways to keep your toddler connected while we wait for our lives to go back to "normal." Here are five ways to support your child's social needs during quarantine.

1. Go virtual.

Reach out to family and friends regularly via phone and video chats. A toddler's attention span typically isn't very long, but getting to hear someone's vocal inflections or see their facial expressions over FaceTime for even just a few minutes each day can go a long way toward meeting their social needs.

2. Get together outside.

Just because you're social distancing doesn't mean you can't have any in-person interactions. Safe and easy options include talking with neighbors through the fence, or having a block "dance party" where everyone stays in their own driveway.

3. Emphasize the relationships within your own home.

A toddler's relationship with parents, siblings and even pets is a valuable part of their social-emotional development. Secure attachments with family members will help your child form stronger friendships later in life. Each distinct relationship can help teach empathy, responsibility, and how to navigate sharing space with others.

4. Read books together.

Books can be a great escape from everyday life, and a great bonding experience for you and your toddler. Make it a point to read about different places and circumstances than those your child typically experiences. This will build their imagination and allow them to see the world from new perspectives.

5. Make a craft and send it to a friend or loved one.

Help your toddler with a heartfelt craft project to mail to someone they miss. This is a fun, tangible way for them to interact with people they can't see in person. Plus, they can look forward to receiving their own letter or package in return.

Lastly, one of the most important things you can do for your child during this time is to not worry excessively. Children don't need a certain number of friends or a specific kind of interaction to thrive. They tend to be resilient and adaptable, and any temporary social deprivation now is unlikely to have a long-term effect on their development.