

Building Friendships through Playdates

Leslie R. Cohen, Ph.D., BCBA
Antoinette Falco, MFA



AutismONTARIO

see the potential

voir le potentiel

Getting Ready

Most of what makes a play date successful happens before the playdate begins.

A lot of work goes into getting ready for a play date, but it's worth it.

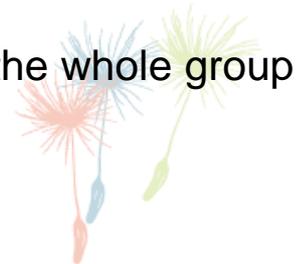
When play dates work, kids gain confidence that carries over to their social interactions at school and in the community.



Finding Kids



- Siblings and cousins can be great practice partners.
- Build relationships with other parents. (Carpooling, helping with special classroom and school events, socializing at drop-off and pick-up, having parents over or meeting for coffee).
- Observing kids at school, on the playground, or during other activities, such as swimming and sports can help you identify good play partners for your child.
- Ask school staff, coaches, and group leaders about who your child is already interested in playing with.
- Offer to ferry kids to events or take the whole group out for a treat after an activity.



How Can I Tell Which Kids are Best for my Kid?

- You will learn more about what works by having play dates, so hang in there: it might not be perfect at first.
- Kids who are a few steps ahead of your kid can be great role models, as long as they share interests with your child.
- Personalities matter. Kids with a good sense of humor, tolerant kids, and kids who lead during play all have something to offer.
- Who does your kid like? Sometimes kids seem to clash but learn to get along because they just like each other.
- It's easiest to start with kids who are pretty well regulated.



Don't Rule Out . . .



- Kids who are younger or older if your child seems to like them.
- Boys for girls and girls for boys
- Other kids with special needs as long as the fit is good.



Plan to Support

Many people wish that kids with ASD would just learn to play with other kids by osmosis. The truth is that these social skills represent some of the biggest challenges they face.

Kids with ASD have been shown to do much better when play activities are organized, structured, and supported by adults until they have gained the confidence to play with peers on their own.

Play partners coming into an unfamiliar setting will also benefit from structure and initial guidance from a helpful adult. All kids are still learning to have successful social interactions and friendships.



Plan the Activities



Important Components Include:

- Structure
- Organization
- Fun for both kids
- Short to start out (30 minutes)
- Many opportunities to interact
- A mix of physical, interactive and quiet activities
- Activities that your child is already good at
- Ending on a high note.
- Reduced down time.



A Sample Playdate Plan (3 to 6 years old)

1. Pick up friend.
2. Snack together.
3. Paper mosaics.
4. Back yard games (treasure hunt, circuit, water balloon toss and catch).
5. Making fruit fizzes.
6. Board games (puzzles, lego).
7. Bibbity, Boppity, Boo.
8. Goodbyes (take friend home).



A Sample Play Date Plan (7 plus years old)

1. Pick up friend.
2. Pack snacks for the park.
3. Ride bikes or scooters to park.
4. Organized sport games (Horse, modified baseball, football or hockey, equipment, tail tag).
5. Refreshments.
6. Ride back to the house.
7. Board games, construction, art.
8. Goodbyes (take friend home).



Brainstorm a Playdate

1. Make an activity plan.
2. What are your backup activities?
3. How long will your playdate last?
4. How will you end on a high note?
5. Does it work for you and the other parent?



Getting Your Child Ready for Play Dates



Priming is one of the strongest teaching procedures you can use to help your child be successful during the play date. What is priming? It can include:

- Becoming familiar with the structure and materials.
- Practicing activities in advance.
- Practicing social interactions that will occur at key times during the playdate, such as sharing materials, comments, compliments, responding, and greetings.



Adding Visual Structure

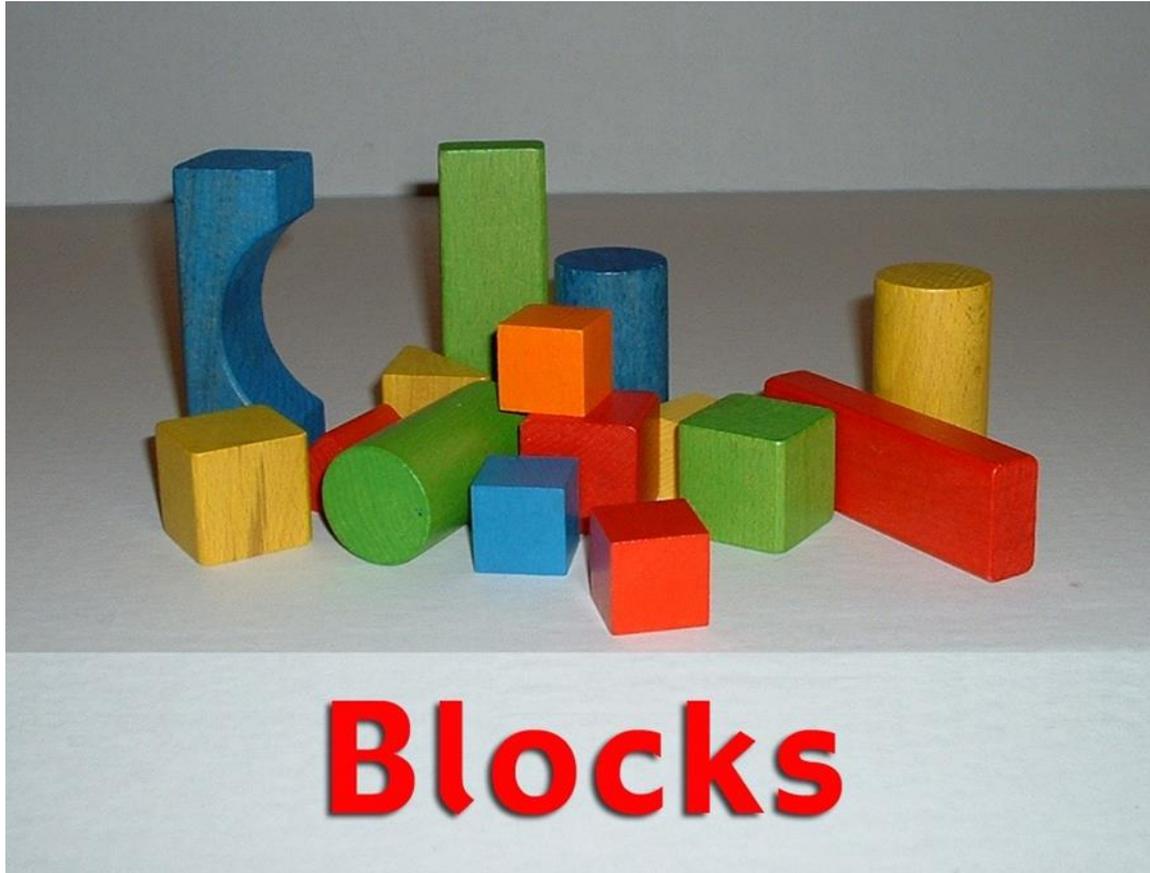
- Schedule books (My turn, your turn, building and cooking schedules)
- Choice boards (Activities, prizes, turn taking support (songs, games))
- Materials management (Baskets, stations, step-by-step arrangement)

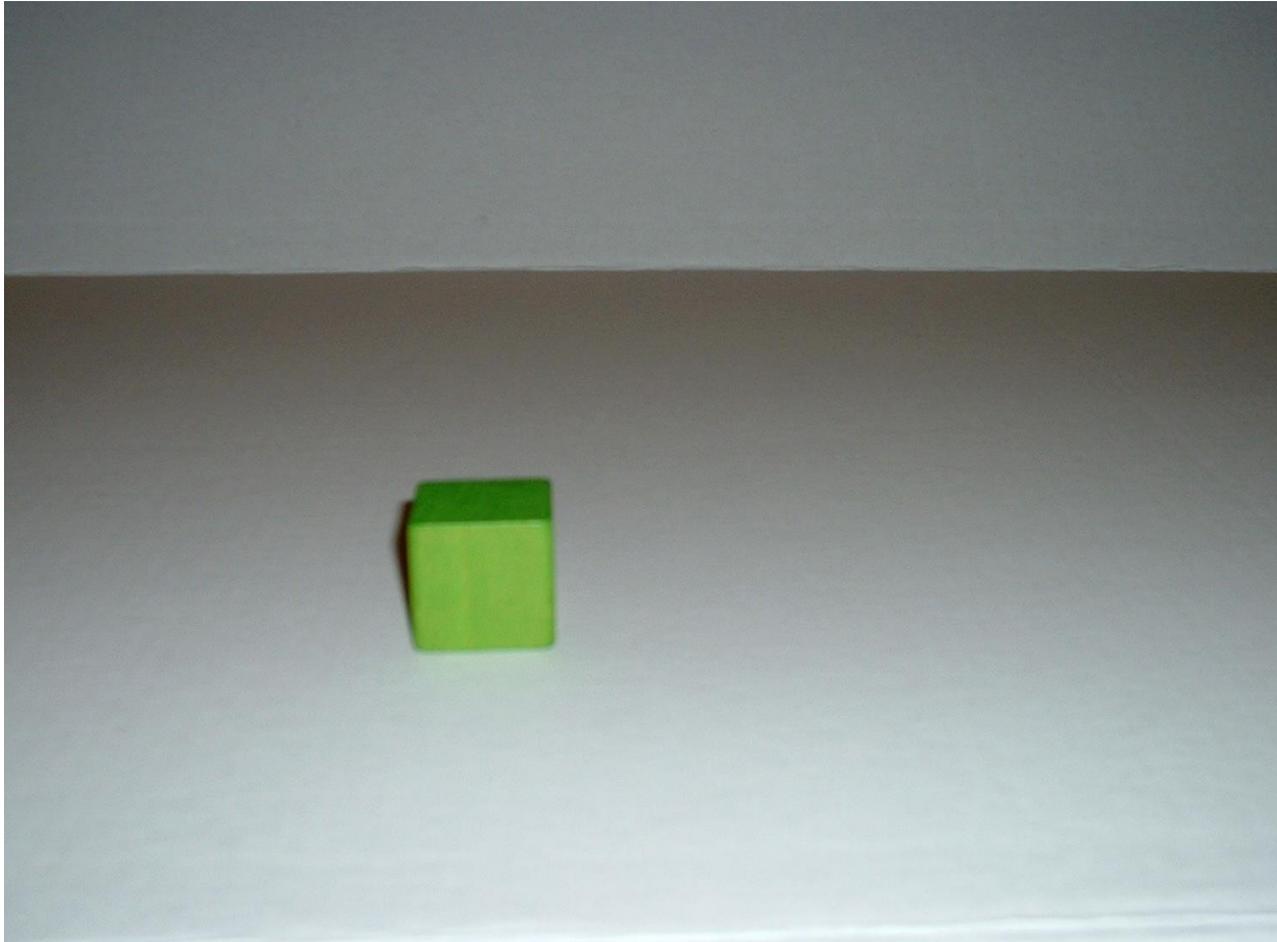


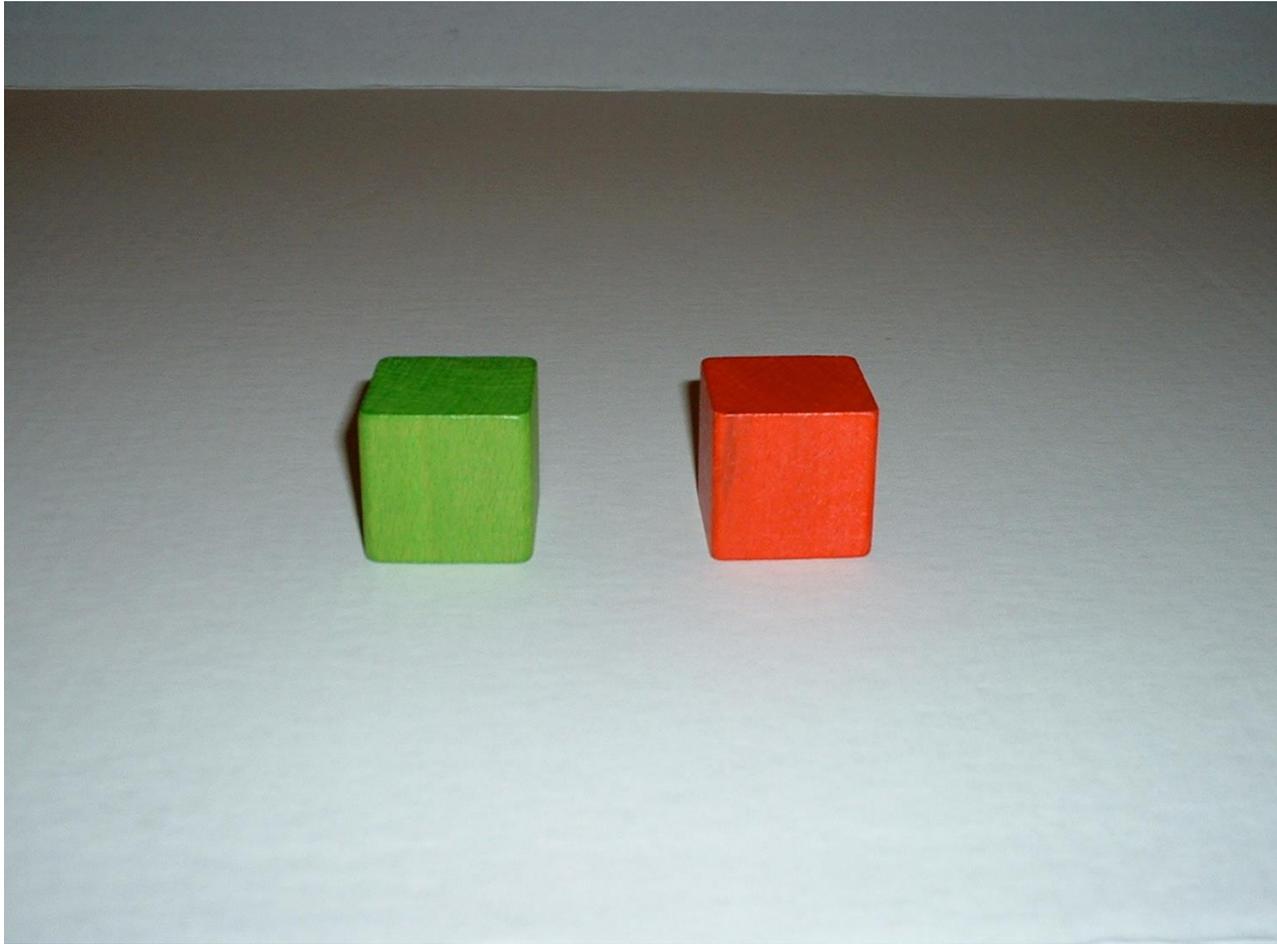
Choice Board

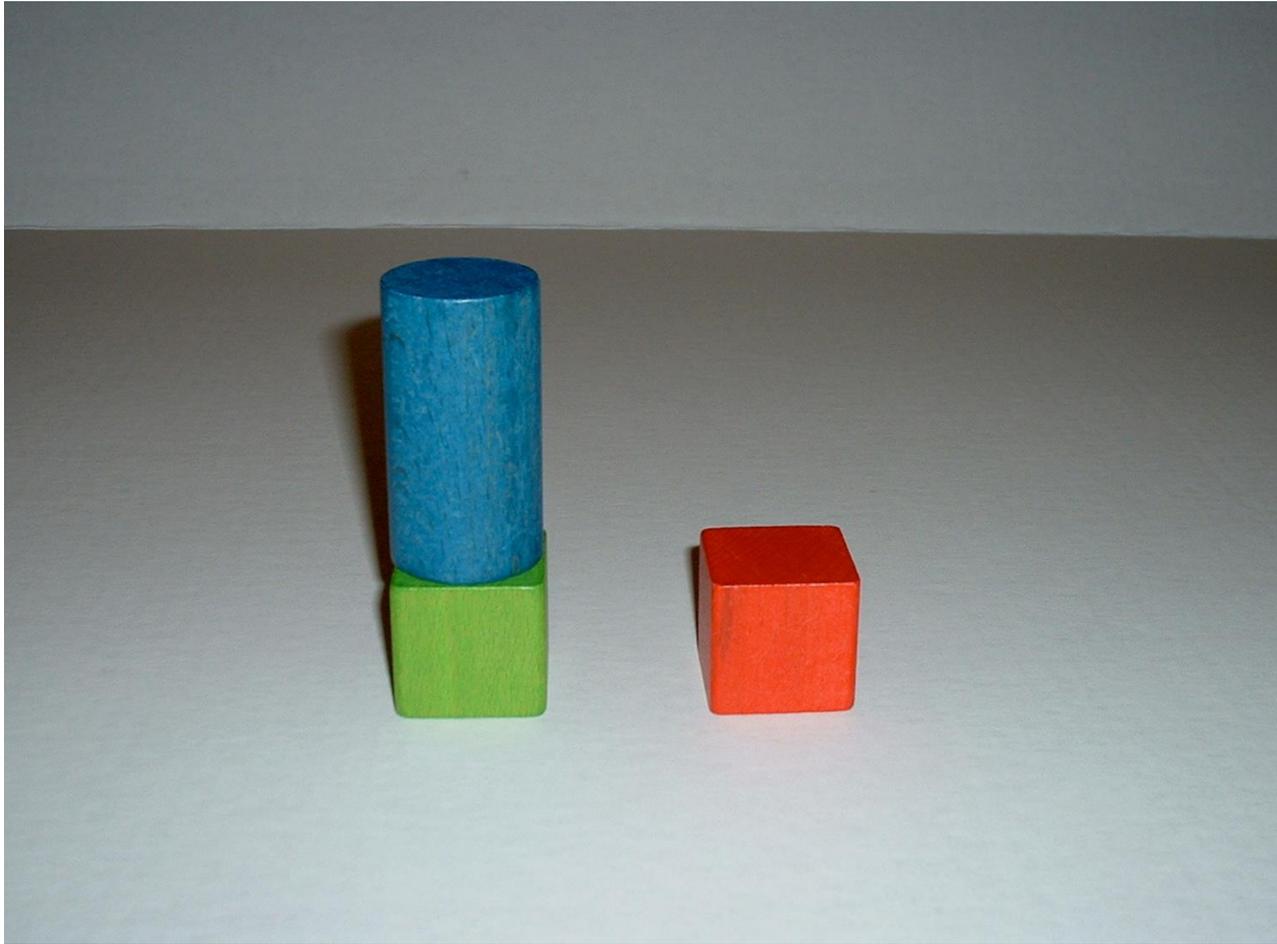


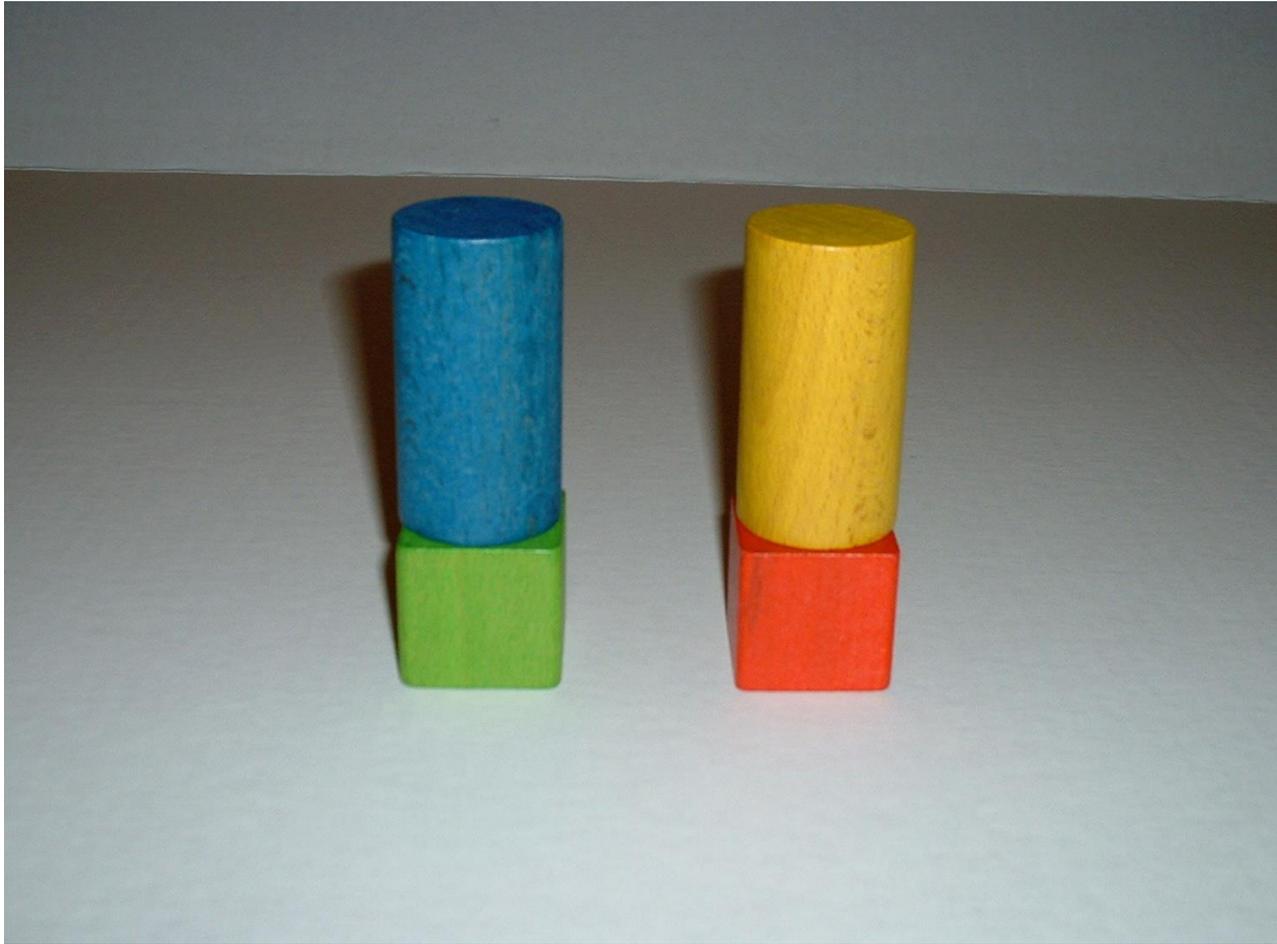
Construction Schedule

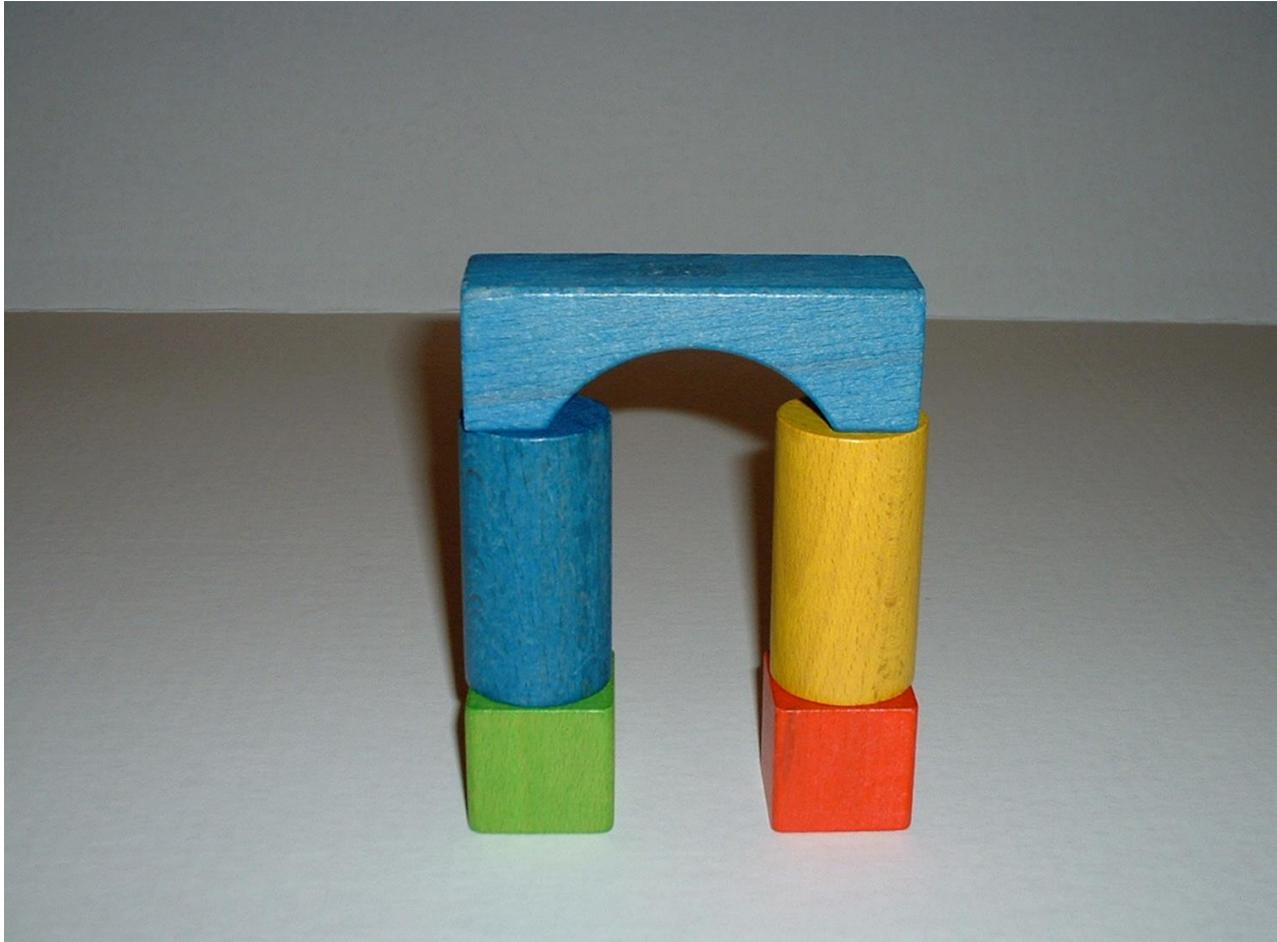


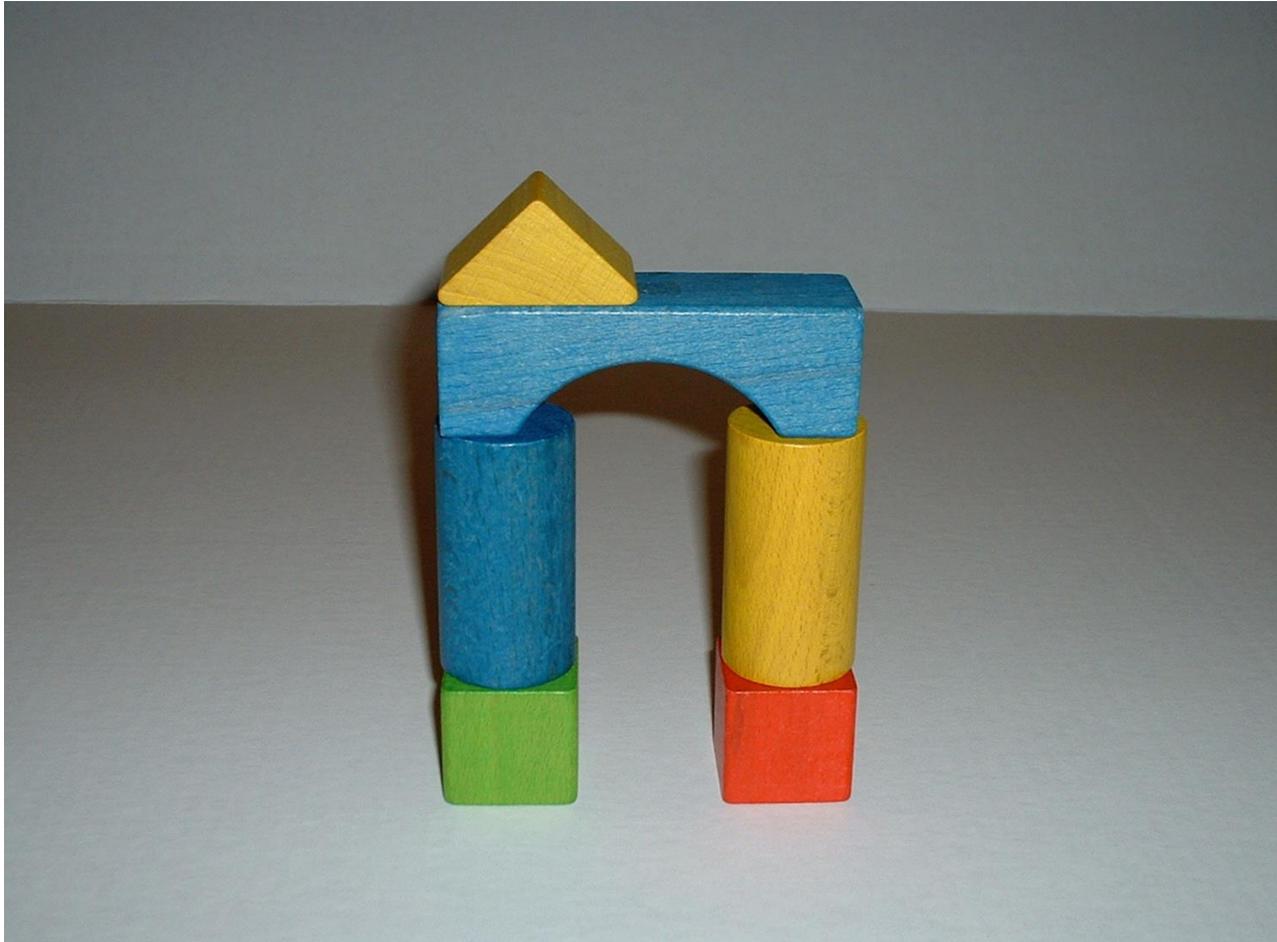
















HOORAY!



Embedding Opportunities to Interact

- Mixing puzzles
- Sharing art materials
- Defining roles, tools, and materials (cooking, making a video, bowling, t-ball)
- Kids gang up on adults



Taking the Social Pressure Off

- Parallel play (Biking, sledding, sandbox, water table)
- Anyone can do it (Jumping in leaves, rolling down a hill)
- Shared experiences (splash pad, movies, expeditions, eating an ice cream)



During the Playdate

- You may still have to prompt your child and even coach the peer in getting interactions going. It's important to focus on shifting children from interacting with you to interacting with each other.
- Telescoping is a helpful technique where parents insert themselves into the play situation to solve problems, break the ice, and support interaction, then fade back as kids are interacting well.
- Look out for down time, activities that aren't working, and communication failures.



After the Playdate: Some Questions to Ask

- Did the playdate end at the right time? (Were the kids still interacting?)
- Were there enough opportunities for peer interaction?
- Did both kids have fun?
- Was it a positive experience for you?
- Did you have enough help?
- How was the fit with the peer?
- Was it easy to arrange things with the peer's parents?



A Helpful Guide



PIVOTAL RESPONSE TREATMENT®

Improving Socialization in Individuals with Autism

Lynn Kern Koegel, PhD, CCC-SLP

PRT Certification ©

www.koegelautism.com

www.education.ucsb.edu/autism

<http://www.autismprthelp.com/books-and-manuals.php>



Q&A

