



COMPANION GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Use the Companion Guide for Families to assist with supporting peer interactions in your home.

The AFIRM for Paras modules were developed for paraprofessionals at elementary schools. However, the practices outlined in the modules can be helpful for families to use at home and can be used with a variety of ages. This companion guide is designed to offer a brief description of steps for supporting peer interactions and provides some ideas of how you might do this in your home.

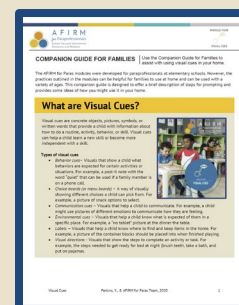
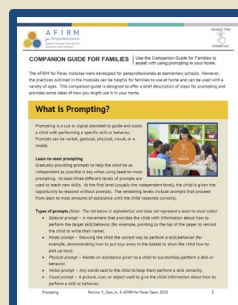
What Are Peer Interactions?

Peer interactions occur when children are playing, sharing, taking turns, and/or using verbal (talking) and non-verbal (smiling, waving) communication with each other.

Peer interactions may be hard for some children with autism, so it is important to support these interactions throughout the day. This can be done by making time for children with autism to take part in activities with their peers (including siblings). Examples include inviting other children over to play, taking your child to a playground or community activity, or setting a time for your child to interact with friends on the computer or phone. With support, all children with autism can be part of peer interactions, even if they have difficulty with verbal communication.



Since many children with autism struggle with peer interactions, you may need to use reinforcement, prompting, and/or visual cues to help your child become more comfortable with playing and interacting with peers. See the **Home Companion Guide for Reinforcement**, the **Home Companion Guide for Prompting**, and the **Home Companion Guide for Visual Cues** for more information on how to use these practices.





What are the steps for supporting peer interactions?

1. Identify the behavior or task

Choose the behavior that you will focus on while supporting your child with peer interactions. Think about what you want your child to do, how you would like them to demonstrate the behavior, and when this behavior or task would be performed.



WHAT	HOW	WHEN
Saying hello	Waving or saying hello to friends	Each morning at school bus stop
Taking turns	Play a game with a friend or sibling	Family game night or play date
Talk to friends or siblings	Answer questions asked by friend or sibling	During play time, online video chats
Share items or toys	Let sibling or friend play with their items or toys	Play time at home or play date
Socially participate in a remote learning meeting	Share ideas or ask questions during a remote learning session	During remote learning meeting for school

TIP: Start by selecting a behavior or skill that your child needs help with to start or complete. Think of a behavior your child *can* do but does not do consistently or does only with family and needs support to do with friends.





2. Choose the type of activity for the interaction

Pick an activity where peer interactions are as natural as possible such as playing at the playground or park or being part of an online class or game.

TIP: Try to choose an activity that your child will be able to practice more than once. For example, a weekly play date, daily online/remote learning, daily trip to the neighborhood park, or waiting for the school bus with other children.



3. Decide which supports would work best

Decide which supports would work best to help your child with the interaction – reinforcement, prompting, and/or visual cues.

TIP: You may need to use more than one type of support for peer interactions. Often reinforcement and prompting work best when helping a child learn how to interact with others.

TIP: Stand behind your child, rather than being in the middle of their interaction with another child to keep the interaction as natural as possible.

4. Explain supports to peers

Other children can help with giving prompts and reinforcement to your child to support with the interaction. Sometimes children are more motivated to perform a task when prompted by a friend or sibling.

TIP: Peers may need some support with using the strategies. Don't forget to give the peers prompts, if needed, and reinforcement.

5. Give reinforcement

Each time your child uses the behavior or skill, remember to give the reward even if prompts were needed.

TIP: Wait until the interaction is complete before giving a reward so that you do not



interrupt the interaction.

TIP: Be consistent – if your child sees that you are not following through with the reward, then they may not be motivated do what is expected.



What are the key points to remember when supporting peer interactions?

1. Start small

Choose one task, activity, or behavior to focus on when supporting peer interactions. Wait until your child has shown success with that behavior before working on other behaviors during peer interactions.

2. Be patient

Remember learning a skill or changing a behavior takes time. Once you start supporting peer interactions, it may take time to see the changes. Keep trying and stay consistent and you should see your child use the expected behavior more often.

3. Remember to give reinforcement

A reward may help your child be even more motivated to participate in an activity with peers. It does not need to be a big reward – sometimes social praise is a big motivator.

4. Limit adult involvement

Try to limit how much you or another adult is involved with the activity. Instead of an adult giving a prompt, try showing the peer how to prompt your child with an activity.





What are common challenges when supporting peer interactions?

Below are examples of what you can do if supporting peer interactions is not working exactly the way you expected.

Your child does not interact with peers even when prompted

Interacting with peers may be difficult with for your child. Try

- modeling interactions for them such as taking turns in a game or having a conversation
- teaching your child how to respond to others – role playing different situations can help them start to become more comfortable interacting with their peers, some kids like to role play with dolls or favorite toy figures
- increasing reinforcement for positive behaviors – when your child does what is expected, give some type of motivating reward

Your child does not have siblings or any same age peers that live close by

You may need to create opportunities for your child to interact. Try:

- helping your child join a sports team, church group, community activity or class, or school club depending on their interest(s)
- using a video chat, such as FaceTime or Google Hangout, to help your child interact with others when they cannot meet in person
- inviting another child over for a playdate. Keep these short (about 30 minutes at first) and do a structured adult-led activity like baking/decorating cookies, building a Lego structure, doing a craft, or going on a hike or scavenger hunt