



# Mott Poll Report

October 21, 2019  
Volume 35  
Issue 1

## Parent Preparation for Playdates

The start of a new school year often leads to invitations for children to have a playdate at a new friend's home. Sometimes, the parents do not know each other. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children age 4-9 years about their approach to playdate invitations.

In response to a playdate invitation at the home of a family they don't know well, 22% of parents would let their child have the playdate without them present, while 43% would stay with their child; 22% would say no to the playdate invitation, and 12% were unsure. Influences on parent decisions about playdates include the child being shy around strangers (17%), being afraid of certain pets (11%), having a food allergy/special diet (8%), or having a health condition (6%).

Most parents (84%) say they would try to meet the other parents before the playdate. Parents also would try to learn about the other parents by asking friends/neighbors (45%), looking at social media (44%), checking out the other family's neighborhood (36%), searching sex offender registry/criminal records (30%) or the internet (21%), or asking a teacher or other school staff (21%).

Parents' concerns about a playdate at an unfamiliar home include children being left unsupervised (41%), being exposed to inappropriate language (35%), getting into medications or other harmful substances (33%), getting injured (32%), and eating foods the parent does not want the child to eat (19%).

Before the playdate, many parents say they definitely would ask about who will be supervising the children (75%), what activities the children will do (55%), and whether older siblings or other adults will be present (46%). Fewer parents say they would definitely ask about injury risks such as pools or trampolines (41%), pets (38%), presence and storage of guns (34%), and where medications are stored (24%).

Only 44% of parents have asked another parent about safety issues before a playdate, while 48% have declined a playdate because they did not feel comfortable leaving their child in the other parent's care. Although 73% of parents say they would not be offended if another parent asked them about safety concerns before a playdate, only 23% have ever been asked.

### Q&A before play

Percent of parents who would definitely ask about the following topics before a playdate for their child 4-9 years at the home of an unfamiliar classmate

- Who's supervising? 75%
- What activities? 55%
- Older siblings/adults present? 46%
- Pool/trampoline? 41%
- Any pets? 38%
- How are guns stored? 34%



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2019

### Report Highlights

Parents' top concerns about playdates include children being unsupervised, hearing inappropriate language, getting into harmful substances, and getting injured.

Half of parents have declined a playdate because they did not feel comfortable leaving their child in the other parent's care.

Only 1 in 4 parents have been asked about safety issues by another parent before a playdate.

## Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in August 2019 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,004). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 881 parents who had at least one child 4-9 years. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 4 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

## C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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## Implications

Playdates allow children to develop independence, gain experience interacting with other children in an unstructured setting, and have fun with a friend. Sending a child on a playdate also may give parents a break from direct supervision for a few hours. However, parents still have a responsibility to ensure that their child will be safe and appropriately supervised during the playdate.

Findings from this Mott Poll indicate that many parents are cautious about sending their child on a playdate at a new friend's home. Nearly half have declined a playdate invitation because they did not feel comfortable leaving their child in the other parent's care. Other parents accept the invitation but stay with their child throughout the playdate. Decisions about a playdate can be particularly challenging when parents are not familiar with the family hosting the playdate. Most parents make an effort to meet the other parents in person prior to the playdate. Many parents also ask friends, neighbors, or school staff for their impressions of the parents hosting the playdate, or search for information about the other parents on social media, in criminal records, or even the sex offender registry. These strategies may yield reassuring information about the host family, or concerning characteristics that could cause parents to be hesitant about accepting the playdate invitation.

There are other aspects that parents should consider about playdates. Basic questions include activities the children might do during the playdate and who will supervise them. Concerns about injury are warranted if the host family has a pool or trampoline; if so, parents should ask about whether the family has specific rules guiding the use of the pool or trampoline, as well as the presence of protective fencing or netting. Other safety-related questions include whether the host family owns a gun, and if so, whether it is locked and stored safely away from the children, and where medications or other harmful substances are kept.

This Mott Poll suggests that many parents are not proactive when it comes to playdate safety. Less than half of parents have asked another parent about safety concerns before a playdate, and only 1 in 4 parents have been asked these types of questions themselves. In some cases, parents may assume that the host family shares their approach to supervision and safety, and thus questions are not warranted. Other parents may feel embarrassed about bringing up safety issues, not realizing that these types of concerns are shared broadly. Some parents avoid questions about playdate safety out of concern that the host parents may be offended. Poll results suggest that such concerns may be inaccurate, as most parents say they would not be offended if another parent asked about playdate safety.

Parents may find it helpful to have a plan for a pre-playdate conversation with the host parents. One consideration is when to have the conversation: for example, over the phone or in person when dropping off their child for the playdate. Another consideration is what to discuss; it may be helpful to develop a checklist to guide the conversation. Parents who are worried about offending the host parents may want to practice their explanation of why they are asking about safety concerns.

Some children have special challenges that should prompt parents to be especially proactive about playdate arrangements. Parents of children with food allergies should provide that information in advance, so the host family can avoid those ingredients when purchasing or preparing snacks for the playdate. Parents should also communicate in advance if their child is fearful of certain types of pets, and help the host family identify strategies that will help the child feel safe and comfortable.