

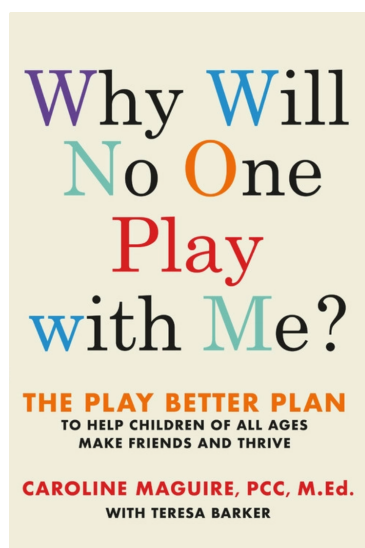
Frequently Asked Questions

About the Play Better Plan and Becoming Your Child's Social Skills Coach



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Can you really use the Play Better Plan with Teens, Tweens and Young Adults?

Yes. The lessons in *Why Will No One Play with Me?* can be aged up. The core of the plan - learning to understand how the social world works - can be effective with people of all ages. When working with teenagers and young adults, the open-ended questions (the core of coaching) help to create more collaborative conversations, helps her talk more openly about tough topics and allows you to hear the root of the issues.

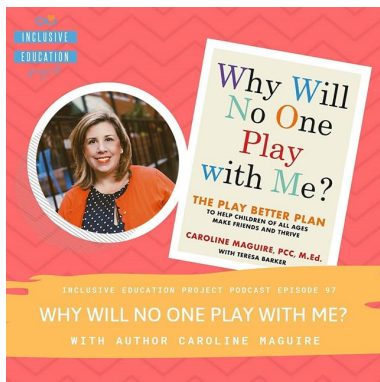
What if my child doesn't open up or engage?

My child just shrugs or says 'I don't know?' or other monosyllabic responses. Can this coaching work? Some kids do not open-up easily, especially if they have been having a tough time socially. Kids will open-up better when it's not a "big talk." Find a location and time when your child might engage. Give options, such as "How about I present you with what I think the situation is and you tell me if I am off base." Use either / or questions: "would you like to work on this on the weekend or during the week?" *Why Will No One Play with Me?* chapter 9 demonstrates how to bring up hard topics to pave the way.

What if my child does a disappearing act?

Why Will No One Play with Me? addresses how to manage reluctant children and teenagers in depth. First, look at the systematic issue. Is your child ducking out of family time? Do you have family time? If your child is not engaged in everyday family life, then you must address this issue first. This can take time, but the **coaching conversation technique** can be your best ally here. My advice is not to demand time or to impose a schedule, rather, to use a more collaborative approach. Through a series of conversations when your child is amenable, explore the reasons behind her disappearing act.

What can I do to practice open questions in the real world?



I include practical suggestions to address parents' common concerns and questions in *Why Will No One Play with Me?* where.

Open questions really are a phenomenal tool. Try using these questions in every day, with everyone. When you speak with your mother-in-law, for instance, ask her why baking is important to her. Ask your friends and co-workers what something feels like.

What if my child is unable to answer open questions?

Due to maturity or learning and processing style, some people do not do well with open questions. Try more concrete, situationally-based questions. Use visuals to demonstrate your point, such as YouTube videos, images or acting out the scenario. Try either / or questions such as “Was it the idea of making chit chat that got in the way or was it that you didn’t feel the need to?”

What if my child has autism spectrum disorder?

Children (and adults) with ASD can do this program, but they will struggle with open-ended questions. Questions need to be more situation-specific because they may struggle to imagine wide-open situations and to pinpoint an answer. Adjust questions from “What can you do to fit in?” to “Let’s pick some specific things you can do to fit in.” I find that the “What do you notice about”...questions work well to develop essential mind-sets to understand the social world, i.e. “How does Mommy act when she is busy? What do you guess Mommy feels when she is busy? Adding visuals to the lessons and discussions will help develop perspective-taking, self-regulation, and the other executive functions.

What if I can’t do as many lessons as the book recommends?

Try to practice regularly. Yes, you can have some wiggle room but there are benefits to keeping a schedule. Building a new mentality takes practice and repeated reinforcement. Neuroscience shows that coaching conversation and practice together create new neuropathways that change behavior. So, if you are hit-or-miss with practice, your child won’t get the best results. Try to find ways to improvise and stay engaged with the basic Play better Plan and see if the results will help motivate you both to stick with it.

What if I can’t get as many play dates as the plan suggests?

Play is social practice in the real world and helps your child generalize or transfer skills you practice in coaching to her daily. Your child can play in activities, with cousins, family friends or younger or older children to



practice. You may not get as many play dates as long as your child has opportunities to practice she can try out the skills you practice during in home coaching.

How frequently should I schedule play dates?

For this coaching program to be successful, **aim to schedule at least one playdate a week and one other social opportunity** in a regular group setting such as a class or Scout meeting. Kids with social difficulties typically have fewer reliable invites yet they need this real-world practice. Extended family and friends may want to support your child's efforts and may welcome get-togethers.

Can The Play Better Plan Work for a Tween or Teenager?

Yes. I have used this method for years with clients of all ages. The visuals in the book are intended to help children engage with the exercises, but if your tween or teen finds them too immature, skip them. Also, you can age up if need be. Hundreds of teens and tweens and young adults have used this plan. The skill building exercises and concepts are the same for everyone. Although teenagers hang out and practice in school, at activities rather than at play dates.

But Teenagers do not have play dates?

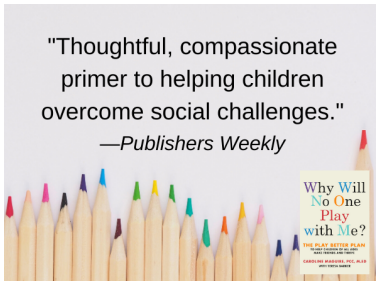
True! Teens and tweens don't have play dates and parent no longer arrange socialization. In Chapter 20 I address this more deeply. **The point is for your teen to practice being social.** I recommend you coach your teen to find social networks, meet new people, rebuild past friendships and find peers with similar interests. Developing the approach and addressing underlying issues is key to exploring what gets in the way and how to be more interactive at clubs and sports. Guide your teen through the who, what, when, and where. Help him write the text or develop a plan to ask someone to hang out. Use the bridging from hello to friendship technique. Turn to *Friendship Is a Two-Way Street* in Chapter 11 for lessons on mixing in and the tools on Build On it.

What if my partner has social skills challenges?

No one wants to be "labelled" - especially by their partner. If your partner is open to helping your child or teen with their social challenges - and is willing to talk about their own struggles - that is so powerful. If your partner denies a social skills issue or won't get help, you may be able to broach the topic tactfully. Getting your partner on board may take time. Don't accuse or shame. Often people with social skills challenges do not fully understand the

social world, or do not have the self-awareness to understand how this has impacted them. Just as children have a story they tell themselves, parents often have a story too!!

Wait for an opening to talk about what they would like to change, i.e. when a colleague or family member made a comment. Start with empathy and understanding. Use “I” statements and don’t focus on the origin of the problem, rather on how you and your partner can work together. Vocalize your feelings and model change, “*Wow today I felt uncomfortable,*” “*I have been working on some things and I am often scared but it’s going to be worth it.*” Open questions are a game changer. If you partner is willing to collaborate, work together in Chapter 11 ***Friendship Is a Two-Way Street*** for the lessons on mixing in and the tools on Build On it. If not, simply hand them the book.



Most children with social skills issues have a parent with similar challenges. Show your kids that everyone is working on something and that you, too, are willing to move out of your comfort zone to build new skills.

My child has no one to play with. How can they practice and have regular play dates?

If you’ve run into problems or dead ends in your efforts to set up play dates, know that you’re not alone. Social skills development struggles affects many children and families. **You may need to broaden your search for a new social network.** Enroll her in a new activity, go to a park in different neighborhood, or meet up with social skills group. Even among kids who know your child’s reputation, there may be a second chance. Other suggestions from parents with similar concerns include:

- Ask a teacher or coach to suggest a potential playmate.
- Practice skills and then join a new activity.
- Ask siblings to suggest possible playmates.
- Tap cousins and close friends you can confide in.
- Suggests a play date to a parent whose child also struggles.
- Consider younger or older kids
- Chaperone in small group such as Scouts, clubs, play spaces.

How long should play dates be, especially in the beginning?

Shorter is better. Forty-five minutes to an hour and a half gives everyone time to warm up, engage in a game or free play and wrap up before anyone gets overtired, over stimulated, or overwhelmed.



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