

# What parents need to know about distanced play dates and more

Chase, Kristen . The Washington Post ; Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C]11 June 2020: H.12.

[ProQuest document link](#)

---

## FULL TEXT

As much as my kids have been awaiting our own Pennsylvania county's reopen date, like many parents I've spoken with, I'm dreading it. Although officials have provided general guidelines for businesses and social gatherings, there is little (or no?) information on how families should transition out of shelter-in-place.

Can I have another child over for a play date? Can my kids meet up in small groups to play soccer? Am I prepared for my child's rage if I say no to sleepovers but everyone else's mom says yes? What if I want to allow sleepovers and other parents say no?

"I've read four different articles, all of which recommend different things," says Mandi Rollerson, a mom of two in Doylestown, Pa.

Of course, if you have a child or another family member with health issues such as asthma or compromised immunity, you will need to talk to your health-care practitioner for guidance. But, in many cases, parents will have to make their own decisions, which may be at odds with what their friends and neighbors are doing.

Abigail Gewirtz, author of "When the World Feels Like a Scary Place: Essential Conversations for Anxious Parents and Worried Kids," said it's important for parents to honor their child's developmental stage. "Offering an understanding of how the virus is transmitted can be helpful for younger children, as well as sharing the idea that different people have different rules in their family." And giving your older children a sense of autonomy and ownership in your discussion will help them become much more invested in the final decision and less likely to push back.

Here are three considerations to help you create your own family guidelines:

First, *consider whether your children will be able to see their friends*. If there's one thing my kids have been missing, it's actual face time (vs. FaceTime) with others, and there's a developmental reason for this longing, especially for teens. "Their brains are telling them to be with their peers," said Ken Ginsburg, a pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

But is socializing safe now?

Next, *consider how your children will be able to see their friends*. "We know outdoors is better than indoors," said Alison Buttenheim, a professor of nursing and a public health researcher at the University of Pennsylvania.

Chrysan Cronin, director of the public health program at Muhlenberg College, advised against in-home meetups - even if everyone agrees to wear a mask.

"The probability that indoor surfaces are contaminated if someone in the household is infected but asymptomatic are too high, and it can be difficult to keep the physical distance from others in a smaller space," she said. "In addition, if the mask is worn incorrectly or needs adjusting, touching the face becomes an issue."

But even outdoor meetups depend on a child's age and maturity level.

Buttenheim recommends parents do viral transmission math when considering outdoor activities. "We know covid-19 is being transmitted through droplets, which can go very far through sneezing and coughing. But even just breathing, speaking and exhaling can transmit the [novel coronavirus] as well. Wearing a mask, plus staying at least six feet (and farther) away, plus keeping the time together short is a good decision-making formula."

Another alternative to consider, after your orders to stay home have been lifted, is expanding your social bubble, a

concept that was implemented successfully in New Zealand and Canada. If the people with whom you are quarantining are your bubble, then you decide to now add one to two people to it based on meeting specific needs, whether it's an isolated grandparent, another family or a babysitter.

If you're going to expand your bubble, Buttenheim recommends individuals share the same goals and the same level of adherence to the guidelines. "It won't work if you don't trust the other parties or if they don't feel the same about the restrictions. You don't want to build a leaky vessel."

Finally, *consider the cost-benefit ratio of your choices*. Anytime you leave your home - for groceries or a drugstore visit - there is a contamination risk. But there are also mental health concerns to consider, too, like fear of missing out (FOMO), and the stress that kids might be experiencing from the lack of social interaction with their peers. Gewirtz said it's crucial for parents to weigh the risks to their child's physical and mental well-being. "We can't deny it's a deadly virus; we're not going to let our teens hang out in groups of 20. However, what are some alternative ways that they can pursue their autonomy agenda?"

Sheryl Ziegler, a psychologist and author of "Mommy Burnout," encourages parents to focus on their own families rather than what other people may or may not be doing. A helpful approach is to create a simple "pros or cons" list or use the "if, then" rule to weigh potential consequences. "Ask yourself or your child, 'If I do *this*, then *what* could happen?' It's a helpful way to evaluate the risk of a potential meetup or activity."

If you're wondering which outdoor activities would be the best-case scenario, Cronin recommends ones that can be done individually and at a safe physical distance. "Touching the same object is not advisable, nor are sports where kids are in close contact, like football, even with masks on."

So, think bicycle races instead of basketball. Try a bring-your-own-food outdoor picnic with a friend vs. a party with a group of schoolmates. And maybe it's time for your child and one friend to pick up a new outdoor hobby, such as rollerblading or skateboarding.

If you're deciding to continue a strict quarantine, Justin Coulson, a psychologist and author of "9 Ways to a Resilient Child," said parents should be prepared to offer them alternatives for the connection they need, which may mean adjusting other strict guidelines you might have in the house. "Consider relaxing your screen time rules so that your kids are getting that much-needed friend time."

Whatever you choose, involve your kids in the discussion and over-communicate. Ginsburg recommends you focus on safety and protecting other people, which makes children feel cared about. "If parents make it about control, it could backfire, and adolescents will think that these are efforts to stifle their independence or control them, which can trigger them to rebel. When we remind them that their actions protect other people, they feel important and recognize that their sacrifice has value."

Although we might feel drawn to follow the lead of others, Ziegler offers this reminder: "We need to remember that while we are all in the same storm, we're not in the same boat, and we don't all have the same equipment."

However, with the right information and an understanding of our families' needs and challenges, we can make decisions to keep everyone safe and take steps to provide opportunities for the connections we all so desperately want now.

onparenting@washpost.com

Kristen Chase is a writer, author, a mom of four and co-founder of Cool Mom Picks.

## DETAILS

**Subject:** Parents &parenting; Families &family life; Public health; Children &youth; Coronaviruses; Outdoor activities; Psychologists; COVID-19

**Publication title:** The Washington Post; Washington, D.C.

<b>First page:</b>	H.12
<b>Publication year:</b>	2020
<b>Publication date:</b>	Jun 11, 2020
<b>Section:</b>	LocalLiving
<b>Publisher:</b>	WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post
<b>Place of publication:</b>	Washington, D.C.
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, Washington, D.C.
<b>Publication subject:</b>	General Interest Periodicals--United States
<b>ISSN:</b>	01908286
<b>Source type:</b>	Newspapers
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	News
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	2411391451
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="https://search.proquest.com/docview/2411391451?accountid=44910">https://search.proquest.com/docview/2411391451?accountid=44910</a>
<b>Copyright:</b>	Copyright WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post Jun 11, 2020
<b>Last updated:</b>	2020-06-11
<b>Database:</b>	U.S. Major Dailies

---

Database copyright © 2020 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)