

## **The Playmates of Children with ADHD**

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**Introduction:** Play is the context for acquiring social skills. Furthermore, social play promotes active peer engagement and social competence, which are regarded as "cornerstone" skills that lead to the development of cognitive, social, and cultural competence. While it is logical to suspect that the social difficulties associated with ADHD would affect play, there is surprisingly little work in that area. Further, there is almost no previous research describing the playmates of children with ADHD. How is the play of a playmate affected by playing with a child who has ADHD?

**Objectives:** This paper explores the play behaviour of children who usually play with children with ADHD, an area greatly unexplored in literature.

**Method:** This study involved children with ADHD (n=112) playing with a usual playmate without ADHD (n=112), and pairs of age-, ethnicity- and sex-matched typically developing children (n=126) playing together. The Test of Playfulness (ToP) was used to measure play. In this paper, the authors interpret the data from the perspective of the playmates.

**Results:** The overall finding was that the play behavior of the playmates more closely resembled that of the children with ADHD than that of typical children; it was characterized by low levels of empathy. Two possible explanations are explored. First, children with ADHD are demanding playmates and children who play with them mirror their negative behaviors. Second, although the playmates did not have ADHD, their play behaviors might reflect the known risk of negative behaviors reported amongst siblings and peers of children with ADHD.

**Conclusions:** Evidence to support both explanations is presented and new lines of research are proposed to examine each possibility.

**Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy:** The importance of involving the playmates of children with ADHD in the intervention, highlighted in this paper, underscores the urgent need for further research.