



## Playdates are the best way to prepare your child for school, according to a leading family psychologist

*Eight in 10 parents say their child has a playdate at least once a month, while 60% say playdates help children feel more confident around others*

**Thursday April 16, 2026:** Renowned children's psychologist Dr Martha Deiros Collado says that one of the most valuable ways to help children get ready for school this year is surprisingly simple: arrange regular playdates.

Dr Martha, who has teamed up with BBC Studios to support beloved brand *Bluey's* annual theme *Playdates with Friends*, says that frequent playdates are especially beneficial to a child's development between the ages of four and six, and particularly before starting school.



Dr Martha Deiros Collado photo: Jesse Jenkins

*Dr Martha said: "Playdates are the most important thing a parent can arrange to help a child get ready for school. There is a wealth of science that shows children's early play experiences with peers positively predicts better social skills and peer acceptance in reception class / kindergarden."*

New research has found that regular playdates are already a part of family life, and around **eight in 10 parents** in the US, UK and Australia say their child has them **at least once a month**, while around six in 10 believe playdates help their child feel more confident around other children.

While **39% of parents internationally** (UK, US and Australia) say the most important part of a playdate is simply seeing their child have fun, Dr Martha says the real value often lies beneath the surface. Through play, children are learning how to take turns, communicate, cope when things do not go their way and build confidence with other children before they start school.

She also reminds parents that **playdates don't always need to be smooth and trouble-free.**

*"Importantly, playdates do not need to be perfect to be valuable. Small disagreements, little moments of frustration and working things out together are all part of how children learn," said Dr Martha.*

*“In the classroom, children need to share space, take turns and navigate bumps and conflicts with other children. Playdates give them the chance to begin building those skills before they start school.”*

*“Playdates are like impromptu mini life-skills workshops. They give children the chance to practise things like turn-taking, empathy, patience, communication and problem-solving in a natural and meaningful way.”*

When asked what activities make for a successful playdate, **free outdoor play** in a garden or park was the front-runner with **77% of parents agreeing**. **Simple crafts and drawing** closely followed at **64%**, with **role play and imaginative games** at **53%**.

Dr Martha said: *“Free play can be incredibly valuable for children. It gives them the chance to imagine, negotiate, solve little problems and build confidence together, all in a way that feels natural and enjoyable.”*

Playdates can also help parents and carers build local support networks ahead of a major family milestone. Almost **four in 10** say that playdates have helped them to build new friendships with other adults, while **36%** say they have had a positive impact on their social life.

Playdates are beneficial, but they are not always easy to arrange. **Parents worry about a range of things** including not knowing other parents well (32%), clashing schedules (42%), feeling awkward about reaching out (21%) and worrying about hosting at home (18%).

And while adults may be thinking about logistics and timings, children tend to keep it simple. According to the research, what makes a great playdate in their eyes is playing with toys, playing outside and, very often, snacks (52%).

BBC Studios commissioned the research as part of *Bluey's* 2026 annual theme, *Playdates with Friends*, inspired by the role shared play has in children's social development and in everyday family life.

*Bluey*'s home at Bluey.tv is designed not just to entertain audiences on screen, but to inspire play in real life. To support the importance of playdates and friendship-led play, we have created a dedicated Playdates with Friends [hub](#) on Bluey.tv, bringing together a brand new [quiz](#), relevant character pages, curated playlists of episodes and clips, friend-focused playdate crafts, news and activations, and instructions for games from the show. This builds on Bluey.tv's extensive Make collections, which already offer thousands of printable activities, colouring sheets, recipes and game ideas designed to take inspiration from *Bluey* off screen and into everyday play.

For more information and playdate inspiration, visit [Bluey.tv](#).

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**Notes To Editors:**

The study, conducted by BBC Studios in partnership with 72Point, includes a survey involving 500 parents of 3-7 year olds in Australia, and 1000 in both the UK and US.

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**Bluey's 'Playdates with Friends' annual theme**

Bluey uses annual brand themes to provide clear and inspiring framework for fans to engage with over the course of the year. The 2026 theme, Playdates with Friends, focuses on a key, resonant theme in the show, grounded in insights about how vital playdates are to children's social learning and development, as well as their importance for parents.

**About Bluey**

The series follows Bluey, a loveable, inexhaustible, Blue Heeler, who lives with her Mum, Dad and her little sister, Bingo. Bluey uses her limitless energy to play games that unfold in unpredictable and hilarious ways, bringing her family and the whole neighbourhood into her world of fun.

Bluey is created and written by Joe Brumm, produced by multi-E Emmy® Award-winning Ludo Studio for ABC KIDS (Australia), and co-commissioned by ABC Children's and BBC Studios Kids & Family. Financed in association with Screen Australia, Bluey is proudly 100% created, written, animated, and post-produced in Brisbane, Australia, with funding from the Queensland Government through Screen Queensland and the Australian Government. BBC Studios hold the global distribution and merchandise rights.

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### **About BBC Studios**

BBC Studios is the main commercial arm of BBC Commercial Ltd and generated revenues of £2.1 billion in the last year and profits of over £200 million for a fourth consecutive year. Able to take an idea seamlessly from thought to screen and beyond, the business is built on two operating areas: the content studio, which produces, invests and distributes TV and audio globally and media & streaming, with BBC branded channels, services including UKTV, BBC.com and BritBox International and joint ventures in the UK and internationally. The business made almost 3,300 hours of award-winning British programmes last year for a wide range of UK and global broadcasters and platforms. Its content is internationally recognised across a broad range of genres and specialisms, and includes world-famous brands like Strictly Come Dancing/Dancing with the Stars, the Planet series, Bluey and Doctor Who.

### **About Dr Martha Deiros Collado**

Dr Martha Deiros Collado is a clinical psychologist, author and creator of The Confident Parent Courses. With a doctorate from UCL and training in family therapy from The Tavistock, Martha has 25 years of experience in the field. Her first book, *How To Be the Grown-Up* became an instant Sunday Times best-seller. She is also published in peer reviewed papers and regularly comments in national newspapers. Dr Martha is a chartered member of The British Psychological Society and a practitioner psychologist registered with the HCPC.

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