Special Play Time for Parent and Child

Schedule a one on one “special time” with your child. Practice the skills described and your relationship can be strengthened, your child will share feelings more openly with you, their confidence will increase and their emotions and behaviors should improve. Play is the natural way that children communicate. Play sessions will help them have a voice and help them release tension in a positive way. They need parents to help them create opportunities to have their voices heard though the play. During this time you will build a different relationship with your child and create a place where they can feel fully accepted and understood as they play out their problems. Though this play your child should begin to feel better and behave better.

1. Schedule the time. This can be 10-30 minutes every day. Or, 30 minutes a week. Make time in your schedule to do this one thing and focus only on your child. Put your phone in another room (I promise you will survive!). Do not take away the play time as a punishment for poor choices that the child made during the week. Be consistent.
2. Set up a place to have the “special time”. This could be at the kitchen table, on a blanket on the floor or in a particular room. You can put up a “Do Not Disturb” Sign to let others know you should not be interrupted. Be sure to have toys displayed that allow the child to be creative without your help. (See the Toy List Provided). Allow the child to choose or lead the play.
3. Use the following PRIDE skills during the play time:

Praise- Praise the effort your child is making and praise the appropriate behavior. This will help to increase the appropriate behavior that you desire to see from your child. Your child’s self-esteem can increase as they become more aware of the efforts they are making. They will feel proud of themselves and happy that you can see their effort.

Examples: “That was really hard but you did it!”

“Thank you for asking in such a nice way!”

“Great job figuring that out!”

“You know a lot about taking care of animals.”

Reflect- Reflect the words back that your child says. Like a mirror you reflect back. You create a “Be With” attitude with your child. Reflect their words, thoughts, needs, wishes and feelings. Shows the child that you care, that you are interested in what they are saying and that you understand them. It helps them to lead the play and it can improve their speech and language skills.

Examples: Child- “I stacked the blocks.” Parent-“Yes, you stacked the blocks.”

Child-“I made a heart.” Parent-“Yes, you painted a red heart.”

Imitate- Play in the appropriate way that your child chooses to play. Let them lead the play and you follow along. The child will let you know how they would like you to play. You follow their directions as appropriate. This shows that you approve of their ideas and increases their confidence. Your toes should follow his/her nose. This means that you should continually be facing and intently watching the child.

Examples: The child is jumping so you jump with the child imitating the jumping.

The child plays with Legos so you play with Legos as the child directs.

Describe- You describe what the child is doing. Think of this as being a sports announcer and you are giving the play by play. This shows your child you are paying attention and enjoying the play. It helps the child organize their thoughts and can help improve their speech and attention.

Examples: Child puts the cars in a line. Parent- “You look happy with the way you lined up all the cars.”

Child painting. Parent- “You painted a blue color at the top and now you are painting green at the bottom of the paper.”

Enthusiasm/Emotion- Help your child feel that you are having fun being with them. Delight in your child. Point out the emotions that think your child or the characters within their play may be feeling. This will strengthen your relationship, help your child to know how to have healthy relationships and increase their emotional awareness.

Examples: Parent-“I’m excited for our play time”. “You look happy with your painting.” “That barbie is jealous that she didn’t get invited to the party.”

page2image2143574672TIPS:

\*Avoid asking questions because this puts the parent in charge. Questions also take the child out of the fun of the play that’s happening in the present moment.

\*Avoid giving commands. Commands again puts the parent in charge and makes the play less fun. Your child can gain more self-control, feel more empowered and confident as they can make the choices during this special play time.

(As a parent there are certainly many instances where you will want to give your child commands or ask them questions. However, try to avoid questions and commands during this special play time as you practice the PRIDE skills.)

\*Allow the child to express any feelings during this time. Avoid making judgments or tying to fix or change feelings. Allow their characters within the play to be angry, fight, be aggressive or die.

\* Avoid criticizing your child. Criticism is hurtful and damages relationships. Criticism will often actually increase the unwanted behavior. Set limits as needed while showing respect to your child. Example: “The sand stays in the sand box.” “I don’t like to put the play food in my mouth, I will put it this close to my mouth.” “I know you’d like to shoot me with the dart gun, but I’m not for shooting. You can shoot the balloons.” “Those toys aren’t for throwing, you can throw the ball if you’d like to throw something.”

\*Ignore inappropriate or annoying behavior (unless it is destructive or dangerous).

\*You can give a 5 minute and 1 minute warning to let your child know the playtime is about to end. When it is over, stand up and say, “Our play time is over for today”. If they continue to play state firmly, “I know you’d like to keep playing but our time is over for today.” Let them know when the next session will be. **Parent should clean up all the toys for the play session.** We don’t want the end of each session to be a battle about cleaning up the toys.

\*When setting limits, use the **ACT** method. **A**cknowledge the feeling, **C**ommunicate the limit, **T**arget the alternative. Example: “I know you think it would be fun to break the toys, but the toys aren’t for breaking, if you’d like to break that cardboard box then you can break that.”

\*Take notes after each session to document anything significant. What did you learn about your child? What did you learn about yourself? You could record and review your session if desired.

\*Make sure to take good care of you and practice good self-care. You need your oxygen mask on to be able to most effectively help those you love.

Adapted from Dr. Sheila Eyeberg’s Parent Child Interaction Therapy and Garry Landreth’s Child Parent Relationship Therapy.

Toy Checklist for Special PlayTime  
Note: Obtain sturdy cardboard box with sturdy lid to store toys in (box that copier paper comes in is ideal–the deep lid becomes a dollhouse). Use an old quilt or blanket to spread toys out on and to serve as a boundary for the play area.  
Real-Life Toys (also promote imaginative play)  
􏰀 Small baby doll: should not be anything “special”; can be extra one that child does not play with anymore  
􏰀 Nursing bottle: real one so it can be used by the child to put a drink in during the session  
􏰀 Doctor kit (with stethoscope): add three Band-Aids for each session (add disposable gloves/Ace bandage, if you have)  
􏰀 Toy phones: recommend getting two in order to communicate: one cell, one regular  
􏰀 Small dollhouse: use deep lid of box the toys are stored in–draw room divisions, windows, doors, and so forth inside of lid  
􏰀 Doll family: bendable mother, father, brother, sister, baby, and so forth (ethnically representative)  
􏰀 Play money: bills and coins; credit card is optional  
􏰀 Couple of domestic and wild animals: if you don’t have doll family, can substitute an animal family (e.g., horse, cow family)  
􏰀 Car/Truck: one to two small ones (could make specific to child’s needs, e.g., an ambulance)  
􏰀 Kitchen dishes: couple of plastic dishes, cups, and eating utensils Optional  
􏰀 Puppets: one aggressive, one gentle; can be homemade or purchased (animal shaped cooking mittens, etc.)  
􏰀 Doll furniture: for a bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen  
􏰀 Dress up: hand mirror, bandana, scarf; small items you already have around the house  
Acting-Out Aggressive Toys (also promote imaginative play)  
􏰀 Dart guns with a couple of darts and a target: parent needs to know how to operate  
􏰀 Rubber knife: small, bendable, army type  
􏰀 Rope: prefer soft rope (can cut the ends off jump rope)  
􏰀 Aggressive animal: (e.g., snake, shark, lion, dinosaurs—strongly suggest hollow shark!)  
􏰀 Small toy soldiers (12–15): two different colors to specify two teams or good guys/bad guys  
􏰀 Inflatable bop bag (Bobo clown style preferable)  
􏰀 Mask: Lone Ranger type Optional  
􏰀 Toy handcuffs with a key  
Toys for Creative/Emotional Expression  
􏰀 Playdough: suggest a cookie sheet to put playdough on to contain mess—also serves as a flat surface for drawing  
􏰀 Crayons: eight colors, break some and peel paper off (markers are optional for older children but messier)  
􏰀 Plain paper: provide a few pieces of new paper for each session  
􏰀 Scissors: not pointed, but cut well (e.g., child Fiskars\_)  
􏰀 Transparent tape: remember, child can use up all of this, so buy several of smaller size  
􏰀 Egg carton, styrofoam cup/bowl: for destroying, breaking, or coloring  
􏰀 Ring toss game  
􏰀 Deck of playing cards  
􏰀 Soft foam ball  
􏰀 Two balloons per play session Optional  
􏰀 Selection of arts/crafts materials in a ziplock bag (e.g., colored construction paper, glue, yarn, buttons, beads, scraps of fabrics, raw noodles, etc —much of this depends on age of child)  
􏰀 Tinkertoys\_/small assortment of building blocks  
􏰀 Binoculars  
􏰀 Tambourine, drum, or other small musical instrument  
􏰀 Magic wand  
Reminder: Toys need not be new or expensive. Avoid selecting more toys than will fit in a box—toys should be small.   
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