

Life-Changing Play

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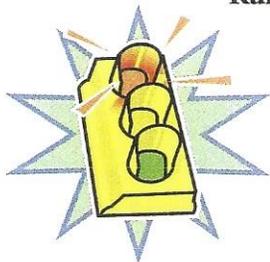
Do not let anything interrupt playtime with your child.

If you will play with your child for 30 minutes once a week, it will change your life and your child's life. You might be thinking, "I already play with my child more than that every day, and I don't see any dramatic changes in her behavior." But research at major universities confirms that when parents spend just 30 minutes once a week with their child in special playtime, many of their child's behavioral problems are corrected, her self-esteem increases, she is better adjusted, and she learns self-control and self-discipline. The last two items catch the attention of most parents! Every parent longs for their child to develop better self-control and self-discipline.

However, there is a hidden dimension here. This is not just the typical kind of playtime parents usually engage in with their child. It is a special playtime, and there are rules for the parent that must be followed consistently.

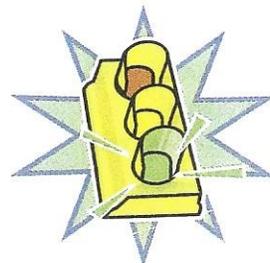


Rules for Special Times



STOP

- Do not let anything interrupt playtime.
- Do not ask any leading questions.
- Do not criticize any behavior.
- Do not suggest any new activities.
- Do not teach or offer information.



GO

- Allow your child to lead the play. "That is something you can decide." "Show me what you want me to do."
- Allow your child to make decisions about the play. "The block can be whatever you want it to be." "You can decide" "It can be any color you want it to be."
- Verbally describe what you see with your eyes. "You stacked that one right on top." "That car (if the child

labeled it a car) crashed right into that." "You're using lots of colors in that picture."

- Reflect your child's feelings. "You're proud of your picture." "You're angry about that." "You didn't like the way that turned out."
- Set firm and consistent limits. "You would like to paint on the table. But the table is not for painting. The paper is for painting."
- Recognize your child's ability and effort. "You figured that out." "You worked hard on that." "You did that all by yourself."
- Join in your child's play as a follower. "You want me to be the doctor?" "You want me to cook eggs?" "Now I get to sit on the floor?"

Guidelines for Special Playtime

1. The child should be free to determine how he will use the time. The child leads in the play, and the parent follows by verbally reflecting without making suggestions or asking questions.

2. The parent may enter the play if invited by the child. The parent communicates understanding to the child by verbalizing the feelings experienced by the child.

3. Limits to be set are time limits, not breaking toys, and not hurting the parent. Limits are to be stated only when needed.

playtimes. She's really capable of doing a lot of things for herself."

Susan: "In special playtimes, I was able to see the world through David's eyes, and that enabled me to give him the support and freedom to express his feelings. What became quickly apparent through these play sessions was how my expectations of my son and disappointments in him affected him and our relationship."

The training that teaches parents how to have these special structured playtimes is called *Filial Therapy* and is conducted by counselors, social workers, and psychologists who have special training in using play therapy with children.

Although training improves a parent's skills, all parents are encouraged to have 30-minute, special, focused playtimes once a week following the guidelines above. You and your child will be changed. ■

Source: Garry Landreth, *Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship* (2nd edition) (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

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Objectives of Playtime

Do not offer objectives to your child for playtime. Instead, keep the following in mind as outcomes to guide your time together.

- *Establish an atmosphere of safety for your child.* A child feels safe in a secure relationship.
- *Understand and accept your child's world.* Express interest in what your child is interested in. See things from her perspective.
- *Encourage the expression of your child's emotional world.* Allow your child to feel without judgement.
- *Establish a feeling of permissiveness.* Allow your child to make choices.
- *Facilitate decision making by your child.* Hold back from trying to be a source of answers.
- *Provide your child with an opportunity to assume responsibility and develop a feeling of control.* Always let your child do the things that she can do for herself.

Parent Testimonials

The power of special playtime conducted according to these guidelines can be seen in the comments of parents:

Kathy: "My child is different since we started doing special playtimes. He's not as demanding. The temper tantrums are gone. He does not argue as much. I think he feels he doesn't have to do those things to get my attention anymore because we have special playtimes."

Janet: "It was hard for me to make time for special playtime each week because there were 10 other things I needed to do. But I'm so glad I did. Within about two minutes after beginning each playtime, I would completely relax. By the time we had finished the playtime, I didn't feel as tired as I did at first. I have learned so much about my daughter in the special

Through play therapy, you and your child will be changed!

Toys for Special Playtimes

- Play dough
- Blunt scissors
- Doll family figures
- Toy soldiers
- Tinkertoys®
- Play money
- Bobo inflatable punching toy
- Crayons
- Nursing bottle
- Dollhouse furniture
- Car
- Doctor kit
- Rope
- Alligator or other hand puppet
- Paper
- Rubber knife
- Small baby doll
- Lone Ranger-style mask
- Bandages
- Transparent tape
- Animals

Do not use mechanical toys during special playtimes. Keep playtimes special by using toys that are not used in everyday play.