



Parent-Child

RESEARCH CLINIC

Tip Sheet: Special Play

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“Special Play” Time

Scheduling **5 minutes** of “special play” time each day has many benefits for you and your child. It is essential to building a more satisfying and healthier parent-child relationship. It boosts children’s self-esteem and helps them know they are important and loved. It reduces behaviour problems, parent and child stress levels, and helps children calm down and feel safe.

How Do I Do “Special Play” With My Child?

- Set up 2-3 toys in a quiet room with minimal distractions (toys that encourage creativity, e.g., blocks, legos, play sets, crayons, marble run)
- Tell your child “it is special play time and you can play with any of these toys that you want”
- Keep track of time and play for a full 5 minutes – this is long enough for your child to get the needed “dose” of your rich attention but short enough to be do-able for you on a daily basis
- Try to do as many P.R.I.D.E. skills as you can during special play time
- When the 5 minutes is up tell your child that “special playtime is over but we will play again tomorrow”
- Pack away the toys yourself but praise your child if he or she decides to help, “I love how you helped me pack away today!”



What Are P.R.I.D.E. Skills?

P.R.I.D.E. stands for:	Reason	Examples
Praise appropriate behaviour (Tell your child exactly what you like)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increases the behaviour that is praised • Shows approval • Improves child's self-esteem • Makes child feel good 	You built a beautiful tower Great job colouring inside the lines Thank you for sharing I like how gently you're playing with the toys
Reflect appropriate talk (Like a parrot, repeat or paraphrase what your child is saying)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets child lead the conversation • Shows interest • Demonstrates acceptance and understanding • Improves child's speech and verbal skills 	Child: I drew a horsey Parent: Yes, you drew a horse Child: I like to play with the legos Parent: You're having fun with the legos
Imitate appropriate play (Copy what your child is doing with the toys)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets your child lead • Shows child you approve of his/her game • Makes the game fun for your child • Increases child's imitation of you • Teaches child important social skills 	Child: (drawing a sun on a piece of paper). Parent: I'm drawing a yellow sun like you.
Describe appropriate behaviour (Like a sportscaster, say what your child is doing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets child lead the play • Shows interest • Teaches concepts • Models good speech and vocabulary • Holds child's attention on the task • Organises child's thoughts about the activity 	You're building a big tower You drew a green circle You're making the dinosaur eat the leaves
Enjoy this time with your child (Show that you're happy and want to be there)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets your child know that you are enjoying the time together • Adds to the warmth of the play • Increases closeness with your child 	Child: (carefully puts cap on pen). Parent: (gives child high five) Great taking care of the textas!

What to Avoid During “Special Play” Time

Special play time is designed to make your time with your child as conflict-free as possible in order to strengthen your relationship. There are four important things to avoid when doing special play together.

Tips	Reason	Examples
AVOID giving commands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tries to direct the play ▪ Doesn't allow child to lead ▪ Can cause conflict 	Imitate appropriate behaviour Child: (Roughly draws messy circles all over the paper) Parent: (Draws circles as well).
AVOID asking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leads the conversation instead of following ▪ Many questions are hidden commands or require an answer ▪ May seem like you aren't listening or disapprove 	Reflect appropriate talk Child: "I have a big balloon head." Parent: "A big balloon head."
AVOID criticizing (Avoid negative or contradictory statements about the child or his/her actions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Doesn't work to decrease bad behaviours ▪ Often increases the negative behaviours ▪ May lower the child's self esteem ▪ Creates an unpleasant interaction 	Praise appropriate behaviour and be enthusiastic Child: (smiles while banging the toys noisily) Parent: "Wow that's a beautiful smile you're giving me."
AVOID giving attention to inappropriate behaviour – IGNORE it instead (Avoid eye contact, be silent, turn your body away)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decreases bad behaviours when done consistently ▪ Helps a child notice differences between your responses to good and bad behaviour ▪ Expect ignored behaviour to increase at first but then decrease with consistent ignoring 	Describe appropriate behaviour Child: You're mean, making me clean up my toys. Parent: (Ignores what child is saying and praises child for cleaning up), "Thank you for packing away the potato heads" When ignoring look out for a "positive opposite" behaviour to praise (e.g., if your child is whingeing and then asks nicely, quickly turn towards him and say "Nice asking. Yes, you can have a turn with the red race car")



Giving commands and asking questions is okay outside of the 5 minute "special play" time as there are many times when it's important for you to be in control. Avoiding these behaviours during special play helps you to follow the basic principle of "Special Play" Time – **Follow Your Child's Lead!**

If your child is aggressive or destructive, end special play by saying "Special play is over because you [hit me, broke your toy etc]. Maybe you can play more gently tomorrow."

You can set your child up for success by avoiding toys such as balls and super-hero figures that encourage rough play.

Avoid withdrawing future special play as a consequence for bad behaviour. Think of special play as a daily dose of medicine to improve parent and child wellbeing.

P.R.I.D.E.