**Child Parent Relationship Training Play Session**

**Dos and Don’ts for Parents**

Your major task is to keenly show interest in your child’s play and communicate your interest in, and understanding of, your child’s feelings, thoughts and behavior through your words, actions and undivided focus on your child.

**DO:**

1. Do let the child lead. Allowing the child to lead during the playtime helps you to better understand your child’s world and what your child needs from you. Convey your willingness to follow your child’s lead by your responses. “Show me what you want me to do.” “You want to put that on.”
2. Do join in on your child’s play actively as a follower. Convey your willingness to follow your child’s lead by your responses and actions, actively joining in the play (child is the director, parent is the actor): “So I’m supposed to be the teacher?” or “You want me to stack these as high as yours?”
3. Do verbally track the child’s play. Describe what you see. Verbally tracking your child’s play is a way of letting your child know you are playing close attention and that you are interested and involved: “You’re filling that all the way to the top” or “You’ve decided what you want to paint next”.
4. Do reflect the child’s feelings. Verbally reflecting children’s feelings helps them feel understood and communicates your acceptance of their feelings and needs. “You’re proud of your picture.” or “You sound disappointed.”
5. Do set firm limits. Consistent limits create a structure for a safe and predictable environment for children. Children should never be permitted to hurt themselves or you. Limit setting provides an opportunity for your child to develop self-control and self-responsibility. Let the therapist lead on this, but in case parents need to do so, they should use a calm, patient, yet firm voice. “The floor is not for putting playdoh on, you can play with it on the tray” or “I know you’d like to shoot that gun at me, but I am not for shooting. You can choose to shoot at that” (point to something acceptable)
6. Do be verbally active. Being verbally active communicates to your child that you are interested and involved in her play. If you are silent, your child will feel watched. Empathetic grunts like, “Hmmmmm” convey interest, when you are unsure how to respond.
7. Do salute the child’s power and encourage effort. Verbally recognizing and encouraging your child’s effort builds self-esteem and confidence and promotes self-motivation. “You worked hard on that!” or “Sounds like you know a lot about how to take care of babies”.

**Don’ts**

1. Don’t criticize any behavior
2. Don’t praise the child
3. Don’t ask leading questions
4. Don’t allow interruptions of the session
5. Don’t give information or teach
6. Don’t preach
7. Don’t initiate new activities
8. Don’t be passive or quiet Remember the “Be with” attitudes: Your intent in your responses is what is most important. Convey to your child, “I am here”, “I hear/see you”, “I understand”, “I care”

**Basic principles of Play Sessions**

1. The parent’s major task is to empathize with the child: to understand the child’s thoughts, feelings and intent expressed in play by working hard to see and experience the child’s play through the child’s eyes. This task is operationalized by conveying the “Be with” attitudes below.

2. The parent is then to communicate this understanding to the child by: a) Verbally describing what the child is playing/doing, b) verbally reflecting what the child is saying, and c) most importantly, by verbally reflecting their feelings that the child is actively experiencing through his/her play.

3. The parent is to be clear and firm about the few “limits” that are placed on the child’s behavior. Limits are stated in a way that give the child responsibility for his/her actions and behaviors- helping to foster self-control. Limits to be set are: time limits, not breaking toys or damaging items in the play area and not physically hurting self or parent. Limits are to be stated only when needed, but applied consistently across sessions. “Be With” Attitudes: Your intent in your actions, presence and responses is what is most important and should convey to your child: “I am here- I see/hear you- I understand- I care”

**Goals of the sessions:**

1. To allow the child-through the medium of play- to communicate thoughts, needs and feelings to his parent and for the parent to communicate that understanding back to the child.

2. Through feeling accepted, understood and valued-for the child to experience more positive feelings of self-respect, self-worth, self-confidence and competence and ultimately develop self-control, responsibility for actions, and learn to get needs met in appropriate ways.

3. To strengthen the parent-child relationship and foster a sense of trust, security and closeness for both parent and child.

4. To increase the level of playfulness and enjoyment between the parent and child.

(Adapted from Child Parent Relationship Therapy-Treatment Manual-Gary Landreth & Liana Lowenstein