

# Special Playtime

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Special playtime is a chance for you to focus on your child's good behaviors and build a strong, nurturing relationship. You can use the time to actively listen and practice praising, imitating, and describing your child's behavior. The more you practice the skills, the easier it is to use them in everyday situations.

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## Toys and Activities for Special Playtime

**Use toys or activities that encourage your child to be creative.** Blocks, crayons, and paper are some toys and supplies that allow your child to use his imagination. If a toy moves and plays by itself, it is probably not a good idea to use it during special playtime.

**Use toys and activities that are safe for your child's age.** Child scissors, plastic pots and pans, and large plastic blocks are good choices for young children. Avoid toys with small detachable parts for very young children.

**Use toys and activities that are at the right skill level for your child.** With young children, you may want to use larger blocks because they are easier for younger children to hold and put together.

**Make sure you have enough toys so you can play with your child.** For example, you might want to have two dolls or trucks for special playtime so that you can easily imitate your child's behavior.

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## Tips for Special Playtime

**Try to spend at least 5-10 minutes each day playing with your child.**

Begin with at least five minutes of special playtime. When parents first start using praise, description, imitation, and active listening, they find that it takes a lot of energy and focus. It is hard to use the skills for more than five minutes. You can increase the amount of time you spend with your child in special playtime as your skill level improves. Other positive time with your child in addition to the special playtime is always good for you and your child. For instance, reading before bed or cuddling when watching a favorite show are also important to building a positive relationship with your child.

### **Be consistent with special playtime.**

Try to make special playtime with your child happen at the same time each day. You and your child will enjoy it more when you choose a time when you can focus on having fun, you are not distracted by other activities, and when the time is predictable. Even if your child has had a bad day, keep the special playtime. This time will give your child the chance to get praise and attention from you for good behavior. It is a great way to show your child that you always love him.

### **Allow your child to lead the play activity.**

Young children are told what to do all day. They have few chances to take the lead. If they are given time each day when they get to know the most about the activity and make the decisions, it will help them feel more independent and build confidence.

### **Praise your child's good behaviors.**

Let your child know what you like about what she is doing. When you praise behaviors you like, your child will do those behaviors more often. Make the praise specific, so your child knows exactly what you like. Use hugs, high-fives, a pat on the head, or a pat on the back to give more power to your praise. [Click here for more information on using praise.](#)

### **Imitate your child's behavior.**

Copy or mimic things your child does or things she says. Play with the same or a similar toy and attempt to use the toy like your child is using it. When you imitate your child's behavior, your child will do those behaviors more often. [Click here for more information on using imitation.](#)

### **Describe what your child is doing.**

Talk in as much detail as possible about what your child is doing. This is similar to the way a sports reporter or commentator might describe what is going on to someone who can't see the action. This shows your child you are interested in what she is doing and giving her your full attention. [Click here for more information on using descriptions.](#)

### **Be enthusiastic.**

Show your child you are excited to play with him. If you are unsure how to show enthusiasm, think about how your child reacts when he gets a new toy that he really likes. You want to act that way. Enthusiasm lets your child know you are enjoying your time with him. When you have fun, he'll have fun too.

### **Reflect your child's words and emotions.**

Reflect or repeat back what your child says. Watch her behavior and reflect what you think she is feeling. When you reflect your child's words and feelings, you show her you are actively listening and help her understand and deal with her feelings. [Click here for more information on active listening.](#)

### **Limit questions during special playtime.**

When you ask your child something and expect a response, you are asking a question. Your child is asked many questions throughout his day like, "How was school, how old are you, and what are you doing over there?" When we ask questions, we lead the conversation. Our questions may also suggest that we are not really paying attention or that we disagree with what our child is doing. For example, asking, "Wouldn't you rather play with the blocks?" suggests you do not want to play with the toy your child has chosen. Asking "Why are you doing that?" suggests that your child is doing something wrong.

### **Limit directions during special playtime.**

Directions tell your child what to do or guide her activities. Directions can be obvious requests such as "hand me that crayon" or less obvious requests such as "how about using the pink now?" Directions take the lead away from your child. Remember, the child should be in the lead during special playtime. If the child does what you tell her to do, she is not making the decisions about the special playtime activity. And if the child disobeys, conflict may occur. We want special playtime to be positive for the parent and the child.

### **Limit criticisms during special playtime.**

Criticisms show you do not approve of something your child is doing. Criticisms often include words like "No," "Don't," "Stop," "Quit," and "Not." For example, you might say to your child, who is using a blue crayon and describes it as purple: "That's *not* blue. You are using a purple crayon." Criticism can also be much more obvious: "That was a dumb thing to do" or "You sure sound ugly when you whine like that." If children are criticized often, it can cause self-esteem problems. Criticism does not help to reduce problem behaviors. There are many times during the day when you need to use the words, "Stop," "No," and "Don't." This is okay. Avoiding these words during special playtime, helps you and your child have time to focus more on the positive.

### **Ignore minor misbehaviors during special playtime.**

Ignore minor challenging behaviors like whining that happen during special playtime. If your child is doing something dangerous or destructive, stop the behavior immediately and use a consequence like distraction or removal of a privilege. [Click here for information on Using Discipline and Consequences](#). Remember that giving attention after any behavior will cause that behavior to happen more often. When you limit the attention you give to your child after misbehaviors, you can decrease the chance it will happen again.

Happy Playing!