

# Special Playtime

## What is the concern?

Children thrive on attention from parents and work very hard to get a “connection” with you. This even includes the attention they receive from undesired behaviors. While some parents believe that scolding or lecturing can teach a child to act better, this is not always the case. For many children, any attention—even scolding and nagging—achieves their goal for an immediate connection. As a rule, any of your child’s positive or negative behaviors followed by a lot of your attention will usually be repeated more often.

## How can “special playtime” encourage my child’s positive behaviors?

In order to increase your child’s positive behaviors, you need to give attention at the right time. Break the cycle of nagging and arguing by catching your child “being good” during special, one-on-one time. A strategy called “special playtime” can be very rewarding.

- First, choose a special playtime at the same time each day. For 15 minutes per day, give your child undivided attention. Turn off the phone and TV and remove other distractions. Also, if you have other children, find something else for them to do during this time, like playing quietly or reading a book.
- Give your child a choice of play activities and sit on the floor to play. If your child doesn’t choose something he or she would like to do, go ahead and pick an activity. As you start to play with a toy, talk about it. For example, say things like, “We’re getting out the cars and we’re going to put together the track to see how fast they are.”
- Use toys that lend themselves to quiet activity, such as building blocks, car or train sets, doll houses, toy farms, or craft items like modeling clay or crayons and paper. Avoid competitive video games, TV, board games, boxing gloves, toy guns or swords, and games that encourage the type of behavior you want to decrease.
- After your child starts playing, keep talking about what he or she is doing—like a sports-caster describing a game. Try not to ask questions, give commands or directions, or tell your child how to play. Remember, there is no “right” way to play.
- Make sure to praise when your child is doing something that you want to see. If your child puts the toys away, praise the behavior by saying something like, “I love how you are putting your toys away so carefully!”
- Ignore minor or annoying behavior but address disruptive behavior. If your child becomes disruptive (for example: throwing toys), warn once. If the undesired behavior reoccurs, end your special time early and say something like, “We will stop playing now and will play again tomorrow.” If you do this once, you probably will never have to do it again.
- During playtime observe, comment, and relax. This should be an enjoyable time for both of you.

## Why should I have special playtime with my child?

- Special playtime gives you and your child a chance to have fun, enjoy each other, and build your relationship.
- Paying attention to quiet, thoughtful play increases that type of play and helps your child have a longer attention span.
- Your child will learn to tune in to your normal voice and to listen when you’re speaking quietly.
- Special playtime, when done again and again, will encourage positive behaviors.



## Tips to Remember:

- Catch your child being good and reward with positive attention.
- Create a special playtime for you and your child.
- Try to set aside time for special playtime everyday.
- Praise your child often during special playtime.
- Remember, there is no “right” way to play.
- During special playtime, ignore bad behavior unless it is disruptive.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more ideas.

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