

## Special Play

### We are always together, so why do we feel further apart?

At times, the nature of your relationship with your child may shift from quality to quantity. This makes sense as you work on autopilot managing daily work and home life schedules. You may feel like you're always in task completion mode as you manage the productivity of your own responsibilities and the family responsibilities with little or no outside support.

All of this task-based, timeline-induced stress creates a shift in your playful interactions and connections with your child. While on autopilot, your thinking brain goes offline to deal with the stress of getting through the day, only to start over again the next day. In turn, you may start to wonder why your kid is acting out, experiencing emotions that have never been seen before, regressing in some of their milestones, or withdrawing and isolating. But what can you do about it?

Connect through special play! Special play is one of the best ways to build and strengthen your relationship with your child, which can result in a better-behaved child for you! Take 10-15 minutes of uninterrupted time and give your undivided attention to your child.

- Have your child identify what they would like to do for their special time with you.
  - If they choose Legos and you hate Legos – it doesn't matter! This is about your connection with your child. For the next 10-15 minutes, Legos are the most exciting objects ever invented.
  - For younger children, put out a few of their toys and see what they are drawn to.
  - For older children, it may be throwing a frisbee, playing catch, playing a game of horse, art, or a game.
  - For teens, it may be taking a bike ride, playing a board game or cards, or taking a walk.
- Choose an area free of distractions or limit distractions by separating yourself from the rest of the family, including pets, other kids, electronics...yes...even your phone!
- For the next 10-15 minutes, all of your attention and engagement is focused on your child. This means that they lead the activity, and there is no correcting, teaching, leading, or oversight of any kind from you.
- Be an observer and a play-by-play announcer as you notice what your child is doing. Follow their lead as you engage in parallel play with them.
  - You should have your own baby doll, Legos, car, crayons/paper, and mirror what they are doing.
  - Imitate your child's positive actions and behaviors that you notice. You should see an increase in those actions/behaviors as they notice you noticing!
- Be excited! Use facial expressions and a lighthearted tone. Laugh freely.

- Limit questions and reflect not only the actions that you see but also the words or emotions of what your child is expressing. Remember, this is not your time to direct but your time to follow.
- Consider using a timer when you are starting out to help with establishing boundaries around this special time. Once the timer goes off, give an extra minute or two for wrap-up and/or cuddles.

## HAPPY PLAYING!

Explore more [Real Goals and Supplemental Resources](#)

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