



Special Play

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

For many of us, the nature of our relationship with our children has shifted from quality to quantity. This makes sense as we have all been home with little to no breaks from one another for an extended period of time; and we have had to adapt our weekday roles to include educational oversight in addition to managing our already overly taxing work and home life schedules. This leaves us feeling like we are always in task completion mode as we manage the productivity of not only our own responsibilities, but now the added family responsibilities with little or no outside support.

All of this task based, timeline induced stress means that there is a shift in our playful interactions and connection with our children. We begin to work on autopilot and our thinking brain goes offline to deal with the stress of getting through the day, only to start over again the next day. In turn, we may start to wonder why our kids are 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, 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 – 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, 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 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!