

CONNECTION BEFORE COOPERATION

Special Play!!

Not a parenting technique as such, more so a way of 'being' with our little ones. An approach that aims to ease the upsets and disconnections of daily modern life...a life that's fast moving, busy, and can easily leave us feeling disconnected, especially our little people.

The aim of special time is not to correct or improve behaviour of our children (although this is often a bonus)... but instead, aims to strengthen our relationship with them.

In its entirety, 'Special Time' is pulled from a more structured parenting intervention (as referenced below). But its overall principle is often recommended via many parenting programs and forums. The following suggestions are derived from Patty Wipfler at Hand in Hand Parenting.

Mama BE
FRANK

So, what 'bang for your buck' will you reap from 'Special Time'?

- Gives the child the essential experience of the parent's full, attentive, loving presence (if you like me, sometimes I catch myself, at the end of the day, questioning...have I stopped and actually 'played/connected' with my kids today???)
- Gives the child a safe place to play out some of the tricky parts of their world. Play is the language of children, by letting the child lead the interaction; we can often be offered a glimpse into seemingly complicated minds of the little people in our life.
- Builds a foundation of trust and partnership between parent and child which is a precondition for them to trust us with their big feelings when upset (as opposed to him lashing out.)
- Sends the message, that even though the adult world is busy, with many 'demands', the little people in our world are central, important and a priority. Sometimes a message that is felt but not received.

“Special Time can help to reconnect us with our child after the separations and struggles of everyday life”.

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Written by Rachel Bridge, Mama Be Frank, Psychologist
2006, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. From *Child Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) Treatment Manual: A 10-Session Filial Therapy Model for Training Parents*, by Bratton, S., Landreth, G., Kellam, T., & Blackard, S.R. (2006). New York: Routledge.
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The 'HOW TOO' of Special Time...

How often? At the risk of sounding like your doctor telling you to eat five fruits and veg every day, every day would be fantastic -- but once a week is substantially better than never!

The aim is to be predictable and trustworthy...so whatever you set up, try to make sure its achievable, for you and your family.

How do you do it?

- **Announce that you want to have special time with each child** for ten minutes a day, as often as you can.
- **Choose a time when any other children are being looked after by someone else** (unless they are old enough to stay occupied with something). If you have more than one child, setting up a schedule can be helpful, that way all kiddies know there turn for Special Time is coming.
- **Set a timer for ten minutes.** Is ten minutes long enough? Ten minutes is the suggested starting point, because it can seem like an eternity, if you aren't used to being fully present in the moment with another person, and when you have competing adult demands (no the pile of dishes isn't growing by the second, and the washing isn't crawling across the floor, in your direction ;)).
- **Saying something like...** "I am all yours for the next ten minutes. The only things we can't do are read or use screens. This time is just to play. What would you like to do?"
- **Give your child 110% of your attention with no agenda and no distractions.** Easier said than done right?! Just try to really notice your child, and follow their lead. If they want to play with their blocks, don't rush in to tell them how to build the tower. Instead, watch with every bit of your attention. Occasionally, say what you see without interfering: "You are making that tower even taller...you are standing on your tiptoes to get that block up there..."
- The 'Don'ts'... Resist the urge to judge or evaluate your child. Don't take control or suggest your own ideas unless he asks. Refrain from checking your phone. Just show up and give your child the tremendous gift of being seen and acknowledged.
- **End Special Time when the timer buzzes.** If your child has a meltdown, handle it with the same compassionate empathy with which you would greet any other meltdown ("It's so hard to stop...you can cry as much as you want, Sweetie...I am right here") Special time needs boundaries around it to signal that the rules aren't the same as in regular life, and to make it as predictable as possible.

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