



DAILY "PLAY TIME"

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Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health therapist if needed.

Purpose: Daily Play Time is a tool used to create a positive, loving interaction between a child and his/her care provider on a daily basis. It involves "injecting" into the child's day a quality, positive interaction even though other problems might have occurred that day. As such, this approach is very useful for children who show acting out behavior problems that require care providers to spend a lot of time disciplining. Rather than simply being play, this time involve care providers using specific strategies to enhance the quality of the interaction. This approach has also been shown to increase care provider's affection for and connection with their children.

Steps: Successfully using Daily Play Time means focusing on several key issues. Each of the steps specified below need to be followed.

- 1) **Select a time each day for Daily Play Time:** Daily Play Time should happen at roughly the same time every day. This is helpful for children because they come to expect and look forward to this positive experience.

Daily Play Time should occur despite your child being in trouble that day. In fact, it is even more important to have the time on those days, because it shows your child that you still care and can focus on the good things that s/he does.

- 2) **Identify activities to do during Daily Play Time:** Select 3-5 interactive toys/games that you and your child can use during Daily Play Time. Select toys that your child enjoys, that encourage interaction, and that are unlikely to lead to misbehavior.
 - a. **Activities to avoid:** Guns, "rough-housing" (e.g., wrestling), watching television, homework, army figurines, play dough, video games, games with complicated rules, games that you know promote difficulties for your child
 - b. **Activities to consider:** Drawing, building blocks, Lego's, tinker toys; for older children- perhaps also card games, board games, playing catch

When selecting toys for Daily Play Time, think about your child's interests and abilities, if you have the toys or can buy some new ones, and if you can do the activity in a meaningful way in 15 minutes. Also, consider setting aside these games/activities for use **only** during special time. This will keep them more interesting and novel. Finally, consider rotating in new activities from time to time.

- 3) **Setting of Daily Play Time:** Complete Daily Play Time in a place where there are few distractions and is away from other people in the house. Sitting at the dining room table, in a den, or other similar place works well.

- 4) **Care provider behaviors during Daily Play Time:** For daily time to work well, you need to focus on using specific skills/strategies that help strengthen and increase positive parent-child relationships. To ensure that Daily Play time is as positive as possible for your child, you'll need to consider your child's age and abilities. Frequent use of some strategies may not work well with older children (e.g., descriptions). Use your best judgment. During Daily Play Time, focus on using the following skills:

Skills	Explanation	Purpose
Description	Describe your child's behavior, in a way that's like a sports announcer. Focus on positive behaviors that your child is doing and simply verbally describe those (e.g., "You're driving the car around the street", "You're coloring a flower with the blue crayon").	Shows interest in your child's activity, helps child focus on own behaviors, increases positive skills.
Reflection	"Parrot" back what your child says, rather than asking questions (e.g., Child: "I'm making a house", Parent: "You're making a tall house.")	Allows the child to stay in the lead; actually encourages more speech from child.
Imitate	Imitate your child's good behavior by playing along. For example, if your child is playing with the cars, you should as well. Avoid doing better than your child (e.g., building a better tower, drawing a prettier picture).	Allows the child to stay in the lead, shows your interest in the child's activities.
Praise	Provide specific, positively stated statements about good behavior (e.g., "You're doing a great job playing quietly", "I like the way you are sharing with me")	Teaches your child what s/he is doing that is appropriate; strengthens good behavior

- 5) **Behaviors to avoid during Daily Play Time:** To make this a positive time for you and your child, you also want to minimize and/or avoid certain behaviors, such as:

Skills	Explanation	Purpose
Asking Questions	Avoid asking lots of questions. Instead, try to reflect your child's speech.	Children are asked questions all day long, and often start providing short answers (e.g., "Yes", "No"), rather than explaining themselves. Also, asking questions takes the lead away from the child
Criticizing	Avoid negative statements about your child's behavior (e.g., "That's not right," "You shouldn't have done it that way").	Criticizing makes the time negative. This is to be a positive time. Ignore minor misbehavior (e.g., whining), and stop the time for major behavior (e.g., hitting, breaking toys).
Giving Commands	Avoid telling your child to do things, either directly (e.g., "Johnny, pick up that toy") or indirectly (e.g., "Why don't we play with this?")	Giving direct and indirect commands takes the lead away from the child. Also, it creates a situation in which your child won't listen, which can cause conflict.

- 6) **Using Daily Play Time:** Once you have selected the time and place for the Daily Play Time, as well as the toys/games to be used, you are ready to begin. This time should last about **15 minutes each day, every day**. Although at first you might be tempted to go longer, if you are using the above-described skills often it will be tiring for you to go much longer than 15 minutes on a regular basis. Instead, shoot for consistent, frequent use of the time. Challenge yourself to use as much **description, reflection, imitation, and praise** as possible during the 15 minute period.