



Parent/Child Playtime: Connection That Prevents Problems

Regular focused, play sessions with young children help them to develop to their full potential in a variety of areas. Playtimes don't take a lot of time, and the problems they prevent alone can make it well worth the effort you invest.

Benefits of parent/child playtime:

- Helps child to become more independent.
- Increases confidence.
- Fosters creativity.
- Strengthens important social skills.
- Strengthens bond between child and adult.

How to play:

- Favor toys that require imagination such as blocks, dolls, home living materials, etc.
- Follow the child's lead during the play.
- Describe what you see the child doing occasionally.
- Show your interest in a variety of ways (smiles, rubbing his back, saying wow).
- Praise your child's efforts, creativity and social skills.
- Avoid asking the child lots of questions or quizzing him.
- Remember that it doesn't take a lot of talk to convey your interest.
- Ask the child how you can help in the play. He will happily find a role for you or may just want you to watch.
- Be on the child's level as you play or watch him play.

Follow your child's lead during play. It will help her to follow your lead at other times.

When to play:

- Even a 10 to 15 minute session each day is much better than no parent/child play.
- Often you can begin by just sitting down and watch what they are already playing with.



- When pressed for time, use activities such as bath time that are going to happen anyway.

Ending the Play Session

- Give the child some warning before ending the play session.
- If she protests, do not extend the play session. Acknowledge her frustration. Briefly mention when you will be playing with her next and be on your way. *“You’d really like to play longer. I’ll be able to play again after dinner.”*

More on Following the Child’s Lead

Following the child’s lead during play shares control with him. When you consider the number of directions and commands we have to give a young child during the day, it is not surprising that he enjoys being able to direct where things are going during play. When you follow him during playtimes, he will more willingly cooperate with you at other times during the day. Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton suggests that this occurs because following his lead shows him how to go along and cooperate with someone.

Misbehavior During a Play Session

If the child is being rougher than you like during the play session, give her a brief direction such as, *“Keep the blocks on the rug, please.”* If she continues, you might say, *“I hope I get to keep playing with you. Keep the blocks on the rug please.”* If the behavior still continues, get up and end the play session. *“Bummer. Let’s try another time when you’re ready to keep the blocks on the rug.”*

If the child is engaging in play that you don’t enjoy; let’s say he’s having his action figures fight; you can use ignoring. When he is having them fight, you refrain from commenting and look off somewhere else, not watching him or his figures as they have it out. As soon as he begins to engage in play you like better, immediately show interest in what he’s doing again.

If the child becomes destructive with the toys, is hitting you or becoming abusive with her language, it is time to end the play session. You might say, *“Oops, this isn’t fun for me. I’ll play again sometime when you are being kind.”* Walk away. After that if you mention it at all, keep it brief, *“I like playing when I’m being treated nicely.”* The brevity is essential. Setting firm, reasonable limits like this will help your child to learn quickly what kind of behavior is expected. This will teach your child appropriate behavior and will ensure that your play sessions are enjoyable for both of you.