

Increasing the Bond with Your Child in Just Minutes a Day

It can be difficult to spend time with our children when our schedules are packed, especially when sports or after school activities get added to the mix. Often parents worry about the impact being so busy will have on their relationship with their children, both in the present and future. Setting aside even 10-15 minutes a day can not only improve your bond with your child, but it will also improve your child's self-esteem and confidence. Here are some tips to get started.

Setting Up Special Play Time

1. Remember that quality is much more important than quantity: Giving your child 10-15 minutes of undivided attention can cause more of an impact than several hours of our typical multi-tasking and hectic worlds. Often, if children know they will get a specific period of alone time with you, they will feel more secure and seek less attention during other periods of the day. Turn your cell phone off. Try not to have the TV on in the background. And if possible, try to schedule Special Play Time with one child at a time. For parents with multiple children, it may work best to alternate with your partner on watching the other children, or give each child 1-2 days a week so that each child gets his or her own special time with you.
2. Try to add it into your routine: Some families spend a few minutes right after school or after dinner. For others the morning might be easiest. It does not matter when Special Play Time occurs, just that it does. Implementing it consistently allows your child to expect a time each day to soak up your affection and appreciation and be reminded of how much you love them. This will make the rest of your day less stressful, as your child will not wonder if you will have time for them.

3. Let your child choose the activity: I know it can be hard to play Candyland for the 100th time, or you might get REALLY bored playing with cars. This experience is about building up your child, and allowing them to choose something they are interested in shows them that YOU are interested in THEM.
4. Observe your child: Throughout the day we have a million things on our minds and to-do lists. Out of necessity, we rarely take time to actually observe and appreciate our children. During this special time, watch your child. See what makes them smile. And most importantly, see how excited they are about spending this time with you.
5. Let your child know you're paying attention to them: Comment on what your child is doing, sort of like a sports announcer. Yes, this can feel VERY AWKWARD at first. But I promise, that passes. "You really like the red car." "You got two reds! You are moving so far ahead of me!" "Your face looks really happy. I like seeing you happy." The first time you do this your child may give you an odd look, but they rarely notice after that. What they DO notice is how you are giving them attention. This shows your child how interested you are in them, and increases their self-esteem by showing them they deserve this level of attention.
6. Praise your child: This one is super important, especially if your child has some behavioral difficulties. Special Play Time is NOT the time to judge or correct your child's behavior. If they do something you disapprove of, ignore it. Instead, comment on what they are doing that you **do appreciate**. "I really like how quietly you are playing."

“You are doing such a great job keeping your body safe and calm.” “I like how you are playing gently with me.” “I like how you are using your words to tell me how you want to play.” This not only tells your child how you want them to behave, but also helps to **strengthen** their relationship with you and their self-esteem.

Other Tips

Sometimes it can be hard to end Special Play Time for your child, especially if it is one of the first times it happens. Telling your child that you hear their sadness shows them you still care about them, even if you can't give them 100% attention all day. If you use a calendar or some sort of schedule, this is often a good time to show it to your child and show them when their next Special Play Time will be. Once your child knows your special time will be consistent, it will become easier to end.

Teens: Parents often think this is not helpful for teens and adolescents, as they don't typically “play.” Teens are working on learning how to be with and separate from their parents, and they may not be into hanging out with their parents. Often a few modifications can help you get the same result with your teenager. For example, instead of scheduling 10-15 minutes every day, pick one day a week. Often on the way home from school, after an afterschool activity, or after church or **synagogue** can be easy times to add in some quality time with your teen. Offer to take your teen **out for a** coffee, smoothie, juice, or frozen yogurt. Sit at a table together and just ask about their week. See what just happened, what they have coming up, and what is making them excited or worried at the moment. Again, try to let your teen lead the conversation. Observe them and try to appreciate what makes your teen so special. If possible, take this moment to remind them what they do that makes you proud.

Closing Remarks

Overall, the important thing to remember is that your child is special and deserves to be reminded of why you love them. Even giving them short periods of undivided attention can not only improve your bond with them, but also increase their self-esteem.

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