

WHATS SO SPECIAL ABOUT SPECIAL TIME?

Every parent I know who has started doing Special Time with his or her child has told me that they see significant changes in their child's behavior. Parents often say that their child seems to respond to it as if they've been missing an essential nutrient. In a way, they have. Why? Because Special Time heals the upsets and disconnections of daily modern life. We live in a stressful culture that disconnects us from each other, from our feelings, and from our own inner wisdom. Special Time is the antidote for parents and children, because it:

- Reconnects us with our child after the separations and struggles of everyday life, so she's happier and more cooperative.
- Gives the child the essential--but unfortunately so often elusive--experience of the parent's full, attentive, loving presence.
- Gives the child a safe place to play out the everyday issues that all kids need to work through, such as feeling powerless, by reversing the roles and letting the child lead.
- Gives the child a regular opportunity to express scary feelings and ideas to a compassionate, trusted adult who will listen and help her work them through using her own natural language: Play.
- Deepens our empathy for our child so we can stay more compassionate and see things from his point of view, which strengthens the connection and our parenting.
- Builds a foundation of trust and partnership between parent and child which is a precondition for him to trust us with his big feelings when he's upset (as opposed to him lashing out.)
- Convinces the child on a primal level that she is central to the parent, that she really matters, and that she is important. (You know she is, but often she doesn't.)

Every child benefits from Special Time to reconnect with each parent on a regular basis. How often? At the risk of sounding like your dentist telling you to floss, every day would be fantastic !!! Think of Special Time as preventive maintenance to keep things on track in your family. And if you're having issues with your child, it's the first thing to change. Often, it's the only thing you need to change.

How do you do it? TOP tips.

1. Announce that you want to have special time with each child for ten minutes a day, as often as you can. Call it by the most special name there is -- your child's name. So in your house it might be Daniella's time and Jacks time.
2. 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, you'll want to set up a schedule so all siblings know their special time is coming soon. One good strategy for siblings as you do time with one child is books-on-audio, which absorbs their attention enough to keep them from noticing you laughing with their sibling. (Headphones are essential, and if they need something to

do with their hands, give them drawing materials to illustrate as they listen. Great for brain development!)

3. Set a timer for ten minutes. Turn off all phones so you can't hear incoming calls. Is ten minutes long enough? I suggest starting with ten minutes because it will seem like an eternity if you aren't used to being fully present in the moment with another person. Don't worry, it gets easier, and you do start to enjoy it! You can always make it longer !!!

4 Say "I am all yours for the next ten minutes. The only things we can't do are use screens. This time is just to play. What would you like to do?"

5. Give your child 110% of your attention with no agenda and no distractions. Just connect to your child with all your heart. Really notice your child, and follow his lead. If he wants to play with his Lego say what you see without interfering: "You are making that Lego even taller....you are concentrating so hard on putting the Lego together." 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. (If you've ever really been seen and appreciated, you know just how great a gift this is.) Your child may not be able to articulate it, but he will know when you're really being present with him. Kids sense our presence and they "follow" it like a magnet.

6. End Special Time when the timer buzzes. If your child has a meltdown, handle it with the emotional coaching "it feels sad when special time comes to an end". Special time needs boundaries.

Common Questions about special time

Can chores ... homework be special time?? ONLY IF IT IS THE CHILDS CHIOCE!!!!

Why not use "screen time" in special time if it is my child's choice? It is not a problem if screen time is part of a range of activity choices your child makes i.e. one day it is football, another drawing , another screen time ,another a board game.

The problem with agreeing for screen time to be the activity is it reduces the opportunity to build relationships and for social coaching/learning. Children who spend excessive time in front of screens are not developing the social skills they need to effectively handle interpersonal relationships. One reason is that they aren't getting the same practice in two-way conversation as children of previous generations; their time is given instead to engaging with a device that doesn't reciprocate. That's a problem, because kids need to learn how to initiate a conversation, listen and respond appropriately, and deal with the uncomfortable pauses and conflicts that sometimes arise when interacting with real people.

Children who depend heavily on devices may use them to avoid the discomforts of social interaction by, say, checking every few minutes for text messages or retreating into a video game while waiting for dinner to be served at a restaurant

Screen time

"Screen time" is a term used for activities done in front of a screen, such as watching TV, working on a computer, or playing video games. Screen time is sedentary activity, meaning you are being physically inactive while sitting down. Very little energy is used during screen time.

Most children spend about 3 hours a day watching TV. Added together, all types of screen time can total 5 to 7 hours a day.

Too much screen time can:

- 1) Make it hard for your child to sleep at night
- 2) Raise your child's risk of attention problems, anxiety, and depression
- 3) Raise your child's risk of gaining too much weight (obesity)

Computers can help kids with their schoolwork. But surfing the internet, spending too much time on Facebook, or watching YouTube videos is considered unhealthy screen time.

Current Screen Time Guidelines

Children under age 2 should have no screen time.

Limit screen time to 1 to 2 hours a day for children over age 2.

Despite what ads may say, videos that are aimed at very young children do not improve their development.

How to Decrease Screen Time

Cutting down to 2 hours a day can be hard for some children because TV may be such a large part of their daily routines. But you can help your children by telling them how sedentary activities affect their overall health. Talk to them about things they can do to be healthier.

To decrease screen time:

- Remove the TV or computer from your child's bedroom.
- DO NOT allow TV watching during meals or homework.
- DO NOT let your child eat while watching TV or using the computer.
- DO NOT leave the TV on for background noise. Turn on the radio instead, or have no background noise.
- Decide which programs to watch ahead of time. Turn off the TV when those programs are over.
- Suggest other activities, such as family board games, puzzles, or going for a walk.
- Keep a record of how much time is spent in front of a screen. Try to spend the same amount of time being active.

