

Paying Attention to Your Child's Good Play Behavior

This step of the program involves learning how to pay attention to your child's desirable behavior when it happens during playtime. To learn how, it is first necessary to practice the skills of what we call "paying attention." Later, we will show you how to use these new "attending" skills to increase your child's compliance with commands and requests as well as other positive behavior. Paying attention to your child's play behavior involves the following:

1. If your child is younger than 9 years, select a time each day that is to become your "special time" with your child. This can be after other children are off to school in the morning if the child is preschool age or after school or dinner if your child is of school age. Set aside 20 minutes each day at this time in order to practice this special playtime with your child. If your child is 9 years or older, you do not have to choose a standard time each day for this special time. Instead, find a time each day as it may arise when your child seems to be enjoying a play activity alone. Then, stop what you are doing and join in the child's play, following the instructions below.
2. No other children are to be involved in this special playtime! If you have other children in your family, either have your spouse look after them while you play with the problem child or choose a time when the other children are not likely to disturb your special time with this child.
3. If you have set up a standard special playtime each day, when that time comes around simply say to your child, "It's now our special time to play together. What would you like to do?" The child is to choose the play activity, within reason. This should not be a time for watching television. Any other play activity is fine. If you have not set up a standard special playtime, then simply approach your child while he or she is playing alone and ask if you can join in. In either case, the parent is not to take control of the play or direct it—The child is to choose the play activity.
4. **Relax!!!** Casually watch what your child is doing for a few minutes, and then join in where it seems appropriate. Do not try to set up this special playtime when you are upset, very busy, or planning to leave the house immediately for some errand or trip, as your mind will be preoccupied by these matters and the quality of your attention to your child will be quite poor.
5. After watching your child's play, begin to describe out loud what your child is doing. This is done to show your child that you find his or her play interesting, similar to the way a sportscaster might describe a baseball or football game over the radio. It should be somewhat exciting and action oriented, not dull and in a single tone of voice. In other words, occasionally narrate your child's play. Young children really enjoy this. With older children, you should still comment about their play, but less so than with a young child.

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6. **Ask no questions and give no commands!!!** This is critical. You are to avoid any questioning of the child where possible, as this is often unnecessary and certainly disruptive to your child's play. It is all right to ask a question to clarify how your child is playing if you are uncertain of what he or she is doing. Otherwise, avoid any questions. Also, give no commands or directions and do not try to teach the child anything during this playtime. This is your child's special time to relax and enjoy your company, not a time to teach or take over the child's play.
7. Occasionally, provide your child with positive statements of praise, approval, or positive feedback about what you like about his or her play. Be accurate and honest, not excessively flattering. For instance, "I like it when we play quietly like this," "I really enjoy our special time together," or "Look at how nicely you have made that . . ." are all positive, appropriate comments. If you need help thinking of these comments, see the last page of this handout for a list of ways to show approval to your child.
8. If your child begins to misbehave, simply turn away and look elsewhere for a few moments. If the misbehavior continues, then tell your child that the special playtime is over and leave the room. Tell your child you will play with him or her later when he or she can behave nicely. If the child becomes extremely disruptive, destructive, or abusive during play, discipline the child as you might normally do. Your therapist will teach you effective disciplining later in this program.
9. Each parent is to spend 20 minutes with the child in this special playtime. During the first week, try to do this every day or at least five times in a week. After the first week, try to have this special time at least three to four times per week. You should continue this special playtime—*indefinitely*.

This program is easy to read; it is not easy to do!!! Many parents make mistakes during the first few playtimes, usually by giving too many commands and questions or not making enough positive comments to the child. Don't worry about making such mistakes. Just try harder the next time to improve your "attending" skills toward your child. You may want to spend this kind of special playtime with the other children in your family once you have improved your attending skills with the problem child.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GIVING POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND APPROVAL TO YOUR CHILD

Nonverbal Signs of Approval

- Hugging
- Patting on the head or shoulder
- Affectionate rubbing of the child's head/tousling of hair
- Placing arm around the child
- Smiling
- A light kiss
- Giving a "thumbs-up" sign
- A wink

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Verbal Approval

"I like it when you"

"It's nice when you"

"You sure are a big boy/girl for"

"That was terrific the way you"

"Great job!"

"Nice going!"

"Terrific!"

"Super!"

"Fantastic!"

"My, you sure act grown up when you"

"You know, 6 months ago you couldn't do that as well as you can now—
you're really growing up fast!"

"Beautiful!"

"Wow!"

"Wait until I tell your mom/dad how nice you"

"What a nice thing to do"

"You did that all by yourself! Way to go."

"Just for behaving so well, you and I will"

"I am very proud of you when you"

"I always enjoy it when we . . . like this."

Note

1. Always be as immediate as possible with your approval. Don't wait!
2. Always be specific about what it is that you like.
3. Never give a backhanded compliment such as, "It's about time you cleaned your room. Why couldn't you do that before?!"