

One-on-One Time



Help for parents to engage in quality time with your child

Getting Started

- 1.** You can either schedule a regular time together each day, or just try to find a time each day when your child seems to be enjoying a play activity alone. If scheduling one-on-one time, start by asking your child what he or she would like to do together. If the time is unscheduled, wait until you notice your child playing in a positive way.
- 2.** Next, join in the child's play. Do not try to do one-on-one time when you are upset, busy with something else, or planning to leave the house soon for an errand or trip, as your mind will be preoccupied, and the quality of time together will be poor.
- 3.** No other children should be involved in one-on-one time. If you have other children in your family, either have another caregiver look after these children while you play with your child or choose a time when the other children are not likely to disturb your one-on-one time with this child.
- 4.** Relax! Casually watch what your child is doing for a few minutes, and then start some positive interactions (see What to Do, below) when your child seems to have noticed you and seems open to your attention. The main idea is having fun together!

What to Do

- 1.** After watching your child's play, begin to describe out loud what your child is doing. In other words, narrate your child's play in a way that shows your child that you find his or her play interesting. You can think of yourself almost as a sportscaster describing a baseball or football game over the radio. Try to make your tone of voice exciting and action-oriented, not dull or flat.
- 2.** Now and then, you can also 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, you might make comments like "I like it when we play quietly like this," or "I really enjoy our one-on-one time together." Try to be very specific about what you like.
- 3.** Try to be as immediate as possible with your approval when noticing something good.
- 4.** If your child begins to misbehave, simply turn away and look elsewhere for a few moments. If the misbehavior continues, then calmly tell your child that one-on-one time 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, use the other skills that you would typically use at those times.

What NOT to Do

Don't ask questions. Don't give instructions. Don't criticize. One-on-one time is not the time to teach your child anything new, like how to build something higher or draw something better. If you just pay attention and provide a lot of description or praise, your child will be learning a lot. It is never a good idea to give backhanded compliments like, "I see that you colored inside the lines. Why couldn't you do that more often?"

Sticking With It

This skill is easy to read about, but it is not always easy to do, especially at first. Many parents make mistakes during the first few playtimes, usually by giving too many instructions, asking too many questions, or not making enough positive comments to the child. Don't worry about making such mistakes. Just try again the next time. If possible, each parent should spend 15 minutes with the child in one-on-one time. During the first week, try to do this every day or at least 5 times a week. This may sound like a lot, but it will get the best results and be the most rewarding in the long run. After the first week, try to have one-on-one time 3 to 4 times each week. You may want to spend one-on-one time with the other children in your family once you feel things are going well with this child. One-on-one time should become a part of your natural routine—you shouldn't ever have to stop once you start doing this together, and over time, you probably won't want to.

Examples of Ways to Show Approval

Nonverbal	Verbal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hug 	"I like it when you ..."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pat on the head or 	"It's nice when you ..."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● shoulder 	"That was terrific the way you ..."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affectionate rubbing of 	"Great job!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● hair 	"Terrific!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Placing arm around child 	"Fantastic!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smiling 	"Wow, I never knew you could do that!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Giving a "thumbs-up" sign 	"Beautiful!"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A wink 	"What a nice thing to do."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High five 	"You did that all by yourself. Way to go!"
	"I am very proud of you when you ..."
	"I always enjoy it when we ... like this."