

## Special Time: The Child's Game

### Following and Attending

**Child Activity:** Allow your child to choose the activity. Do not introduce anything new into their play. If your child changes activities, follow along but do not change the activity yourself. Start special time by saying "Mom (Dad) will play whatever you like now. It's special time. What would you like to play with?"

**Follow:** Watch with interest what your child is doing. A good way to describe this is tailgating your child.

**Describe:** Describe enthusiastically what your child is doing. Verbal descriptions may be viewed as a play-by-play account or running commentary on your child's activity.

**Participation and Imitation:** Participate in your child's play by handing your child materials or taking a turn. Be careful not to begin structuring the activity yourself. You may also participate by imitating your child's play and speech. Remember that your child's activity is to be the center of your attention, so continue to describe the activity while working on your own. Do not start a new activity.

**No Instructions:** Do not give any instructions unless the child engages in dangerous or destructive activities. The child's game is just that – their game. Let your child choose the way to play.

**No Teaching Questions:** Do not use this time to directly teach your child or to test your child's knowledge. For example, "What color is this?" is a teaching question. Teaching questions interrupt your child's play and turn this game into your game. It's okay to ask questions as long as those questions are relevant to the child's activity: "What are you doing?"

### Praise

There are three general ways to praise your child:

1. Labeled Verbal Praise: A positive statement combined with an accurate description of what your child did that you liked. This helps your child to know that is desirable behavior and, therefore, should be used often. Example: "Thanks for picking up the blocks."
2. Unlabeled Verbal Praise: A positive statement. Example: "That's great."
3. Physical Praise: Hugs, kisses, pats, clapping, etc.

### Examples of Verbal Praise

1. I like it when you...
2. That's a beautiful....
3. Hey, you are really sharp, you....
4. That's great, it really looks like....
5. Wow! Look at that....
6. That's really good. I wish I could do that.
7. You're doing just what Mommy wants you to do
8. My! You are minding mommy so well.

9. See what you did? My! That....was so nice.

10. You do a good job at...

11. That (pointing) very nice/good.

12. Mommy's very proud of you for....

13. See what nice things you do....

14. Those .... are really pretty.

15. I like playing .... with you.

16. This .... is such fun.

17. One word quickies

a. Beautiful

b. Fine

c. Great

d. Gorgeous

e. Tremendous

f. Super

g. Nice

h. Terrific

i. Okay

j. Thanks

k. Cool

l. Awesome

m. Marvelous

n. Wow

### Examples of Physical Praise

a. Pat arm, shoulder

b. Hug

c. Rub head

d. Smile

e. Give a kiss

f. Clapping

g. Winking

Remember: Always try to combine praise with an accurate description of what your child did or is doing.

1. Praise good behavior throughout the day. You'll be surprised how much of the time your child is quite well behaved.
2. Play the Child's Game with your child for at least one ten-minute period each day. This should be a special time for the child. Let your child choose whatever it is they want to do. This ten minutes is for you to practice your following, attending, and praising skills. It will also be quality time, since your child will have your complete attention. Although Child's Game is a practice time, don't forget that attending and praising are skills you can use throughout the day with your child.
3. Look for opportunities to be responsive to your child throughout the day. Children often ask questions or make requests or bring you something to see. Comment on these routine child initiations with praise, description, paraphrasing the child's speech, or on-topic questions. Avoid criticism, corrections, or instructions. Your child will gradually come to view you as a positive, accepting person.

Adapted from F. Forehand & C. Hanf, 1969