**BRIGHT FUTURES TOOL FOR FAMILIES**

**Guidelines for Special Time**

**S**pecial time is priceless because it symbolizes the parent’s unconditional love for the child.

**Special time works best when it is**

■ Called a certain name that the child understands, such as “special time”

■ Given every day, whether the child has behaved well or badly

■ Never taken away as a punishment

■ Kept a consistent, short amount of time (e.g., 10–15 minutes)

■ Given at a time convenient for the parent, although a consistent time is desirable

■ Given separately by each parent to each child in the family each day

■ Used for a joint activity that the child chooses (within activities acceptable to the adult, e.g., coloring, reading a book, playing catch)

■ Not used for watching television or other passive activities

■ Not interrupted by taking telephone calls or turning attention away to something else

■ Ended on time to prevent begging

■ Not saved up and done at greater length another day

■ Separated from other play time that day by a break, which indicates that the rules are different

■ Shortened by any time out required for misbehavior that occurs during special time

■ Carried out by repeatedly trying to engage a child who refuses special time, in order to convey the parent’s sincere interest

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Howard BJ. 2002. Guidelines for special time. In Jellinek M, Patel BP, Froehle MC, eds., *Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health—Volume II. Tool Kit.* Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.