

BRIGHT FUTURES TOOL FOR FAMILIES

Guidelines for Special Time

Special 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.