

Playing with Your Child

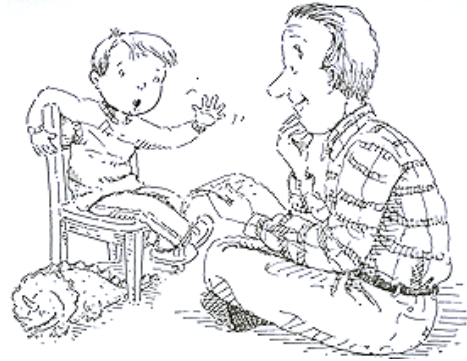
Research shows that when you play together you can help your child learn, connect with you and build self-esteem. Child Directed Play (CDP) is a special form of one-to-one play between you and your child in which your child directs and leads. CDP can be used with children approximately ages 2 to 10 with slight adjustments for age and/or developmental level. Playing with your child in this way can:

- Build a sense of self-direction and self-confidence.
- Allow your child to receive focused attention from you without having to misbehave to get it.
- Strengthen your parent-child bond.
- Help you practice parenting skills.

How To Do CDP

Look for a good time to join your child in play. Watch him or her. Get down on the floor together and within reason move where your child moves.

- Use words to describe some of the play such as, "There goes the car over the bridge." Don't describe every action—just some.
- Imitate some of the things that your child does, such as using blocks in a particular way. Repeat, with more detail, what your child has just said. For instance, if your child says,



"There's the bus," you could say, "Yes, there goes the *long, yellow bus up the hill.*" This is a good way to help a young child learn more words without direct teaching.

- Praise your child from time to time. Be specific. Say, "You're really being careful with those blocks," rather than, "Good job." Try to comment on what your child does and how it's done: "I see you're stacking those blocks with care."
- Allow your child to play with toys in any way that is not harmful. Keep in mind, there is no one right way to play with a toy.

Things To Avoid

- Giving commands about play or toys, such as, "Don't get out the blocks yet."
- Changing the way the play is going. Your child should lead. Stop yourself from giving the child your play ideas.
- Quizzing your child.

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Things To Avoid, continued

- Asking questions. “Don’t you want to build a tower?” This can be a subtle way of taking control, or teaching.
- Joining in competitive games. These can get into winning and losing, following rules, and power struggles.

Tips For Success

- Try this type of play with your child several times a week for 10 to 15 minutes each time. Pick a time that fits your child’s mood and interests and doesn’t compete with other activities.
- Pick a quiet place with no TV, other children or other distractions.
- Explain that this is your child’s “special time when I will play only with you.” Let your child know how long you will be playing together and give a warning when only a minute or two is left.

- If the play becomes aggressive or unsafe, stop CDP. Try again the next day. Your child will learn from this experience.
- For less serious problems (arguing, whining, or bossy play), stop playing with your child and turn away. Begin again *only* when inappropriate behavior stops.
- Praise good behavior when it resumes.
- If you wait out or ignore negative behavior for two or three minutes and your child doesn’t stop, then you should stop CDP as described above.

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For More Information

- **Your health care provider**
- **Children’s Resource Line:**
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- **www.seattlechildrens.org**

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children’s Hospital. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s health care provider.

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