



Your Special Time Parenting Workbook

Make sure every child in your house knows they
are loved and cared for.

www.handinhandparenting.org



Set Your Intentions

Thanks for being here! Special Time is a great way to feel closer to your child, boost their sense of confidence, and their ability to cooperate. Triple win!

You'll get the most out of Special Time when you make it a practice. This workbook will help. Work through it at your own pace as you bring Special Time into your schedule.



What is it about Special Time that caught your eye?



Where are the sweet spots and friction spots with your child or children right now?



What do you imagine a practice of Special Time could do for your family?



A special way to show every child in your house that they are loved and cared for.

Your Special Time Guidelines



Let your child know that in Special Time you're going to do whatever they want. So much of their day is spent doing what other people want them to do. Reversing the roles brings relief to a child and opens up possibilities for them to show you things they don't normally have space to reveal.



Let your child know ahead of time when you're going to have Special Time e.g. "after lunch", or "on Saturday". This gives your kids a chance to figure out how they'll use your attention.



You decide how long Special Time will be. "After lunch, we'll have 20 minutes of Special Time" and you make sure there are no interruptions in this time. Phones are silent and tidying up will wait!



Set a timer. Part of the power of Special Time comes from your child being in charge. Things feel less personal when a timer pings instead of you saying that Special Time is over.



Do whatever your child wants to do. The only exception is to gently set limits if something would hurt or is dangerous. Try being enthusiastic about what they choose to do, even if it makes you groan inwardly.



Follow the laughter. If anything you play or do makes your child laugh, keep doing it. Laughter helps shed light fears and insecurities and makes us feel closer.

When Will You Have Special Time?

There's no right or wrong way to run special time. What matters is that your child comes to rely on these times, so with this challenge we're going for consistency over frequency.

Can you spare 10 minutes daily?

Could you do a regular 30 minutes?

Would 2 mins in the morning and 5 minutes in the evening work?

If you can't do weekdays, what can you do on weekends?

Try hitting a sweet spot where you are being realistic and you are giving your child as much Special Time as you can.

What times work best if you want to spend alone time with one child at a time?

When can't you do Special Time?

How long can you spend doing Special Time?

When will you do it?

How's It Going?



What did you play?



What did you notice about your child when they played?



How did it feel to let them take the lead?



Were you able to hold Special Time without any distraction?



How did it feel trying to stay in the moment?

How Do You Feel About The Timer?

Lots of parents find the idea of timing play difficult. How do you feel? Why do you think this might be?

How Do You Feel About That Crying?

Does your child cry at the end of Special Time?

How does that feel for you?

Your warm attention during Special Time can INVITE your child's big feelings to bubble up... That's a good thing!!!

Feelings are actually a big win.

What should you do?

Simply stay close and listen when your child cries at the end of Special Time.

In fact, it can be good to plan for a shorter Special Time so you can leave that buffer of time to LISTEN

Bonus Question: My child cries when I set the timer! That's OK, too!

Timers mean ENDINGS and can bring up the anxious anticipation of that ending and the feeling of having to SEPARATE from your warm attention.

Don't use this to avoid using a timer. It's useful for your child to work through those feelings - especially while they still have your attention.

Tears Don't Mean Failure.

You aren't doing anything wrong if Special Time is more like "upset time".

In fact, you are doing something really, really right - giving them the safety and connection to show you some of how hard it might be for them.

And that's why you're here - to give them that Special Time attention as a regular practice.

Drop the Direction

What is it like letting your child direct things for a while?

Do you feel pressure to suggest ideas or direct your child?

What prevents you from feeling more in the moment with them?

Let's Reflect

What were your reasons for joining this challenge?

What were your child's first reactions when you began Special Time?

How do they respond now?

Are You Being Tested?



What play do you find hardest?



When you think about that play, what 3 feelings come up?



What would you LOVE to say to your child when they ask you to play? (Let it out here!)



What are THREE things you'd rather be doing instead?

How Does Your Child Play?

Children often use your attention to test their physical limits using whole-body play. This can look like the muddy puddle bath, or other water play, or jumping on beds. It can be running, dancing, balancing or leaping from chairs.

It could even be walking further down the block than they ever have before - all because you are saying “yes” and giving them that added extra layer of safety to learn using their bodies.?

What ways does your child use their body in play?

Have you noticed your child brings up issues of importance or gravitates toward certain themes? This could be issues or changes they've been struggling with, or difficult times they've had to overcome.

Setting Limits Around Special Time

What happens if your child:

- Asks to do something that you don't allow?
- Wants you to do something you detest?
- Gets really silly/messy/crazy?

Guess what we're going to say?

Say YES as often as you can - especially when first starting a practice of Special time. If you are concerned, try saying yes at least the first 12 times you do Special Time.

So, if your child asks to play Nintendo or eat chips, say yes 12 times at least. This builds trust. During these times, see if you can find some delight in seeing this activity through their eyes. What do they love about it?

After that, if you are still uncomfortable say, "We can do anything today except play Nintendo / eat snacks."

Try to make conditions an exception not a rule!

We know it's hard!!! Usually because we did not have these play opportunities as kids. You may have LOTS of feelings about having to fulfill their play requests!

That's OK too!

Try these coping strategies to help:

1. Notice your child. Focus on their enjoyment rather than your discomfort. Look at the light in their eyes, the smiles. Enjoy the sound of their laughter, glee or their looks of concentration.
2. If your child's requests are getting too much for you, scale back Special Time to 2-5 minutes. Let yourself go for JUST that time.
3. Schedule Special Time at a better time. If chips would be ok for you mid-morning, but no good at 4pm, adjust if you can.

How Do You Like To Play?

Ever heard that phrase, "You can't pour from an empty cup"?

You are doing a whole lot of pouring when you play with focus, and listen to your child's feelings.

If it's getting hard to pour, one way to make it easier is to schedule your own play time.

How do you like to play?

- Taking a bath
- Listening to a podcast or music, or watching a show
- Dancing or exercise?
- Yoga or meditation?
- A special food or drink?
- A playdate with someone whose company you adore?
- Doing or seeing something creative
- What else?

Choose 2-3 of your favorite ways to play and schedule them in now over the next week - even if it's just for a few minutes. Make them firm in your calendar - and don't give yourself excuses to play, play, play.

Activity 1: (What and when)

Activity 2: (What and when)

Activity 3: (What and when)

The Best Way to Refuel:

...is definitely in Listening Partnerships. It's where you can take all your feelings about play and Special Time and go back to your child unloaded and refreshed. If you have a Listening partner, schedule some time now. If you are looking, read the booklet on them and post for partner in our **Parents Connect** group on Facebook now.

A Step-By-Step To Saying Yes To Screens

Say yes to screens the first 12 times they ask... It's about trust-building, not teaching. Many times after their faith in Special Time grows, kids will start exploring other ways to play.

Try these ways to feel better about saying yes

1. **Let Them Show You:** Kids revel when they have mastery over something you don't. If they know how to search for what they want, let them. If they want to show you how to play a game, or sing the theme tune, follow their lead.
2. **Lean In:** Snuggle up, laugh, be enthusiastic. DELIGHT in them, if not the show they love and you hate.
3. **Blow Off Steam:** Notice what feelings you have about saying yes to screens. Write it below:

Is it hard saying "yes" to screens? Write why you think that is here...

Next time, look for 2-3 positives you found sharing screen time with your child. What are they?

Let's Reflect... Some More

What have you loved about Special Time, so far, and why?

What did you find hard, and why do you think this was?

How are you feeling about the next two weeks...

More Than One Child?

What happens when you have more than one child?

When you begin Special Time, and you have more than one child you may see these things:

- One child may keep interrupting
- One child may insist on joining your Special Time
- One child may LOVE special time and take to it straightaway, while the other may not.

What to do?

At First: Set the Other Child Up Well

At the moment you schedule your Special Time, schedule in what your other child might like to do. Have this set up and ready to go before you call Special Time. Ideas might include:

- Stations: Coloring, blocks, playdough, dot-to-dot, cars or dolls. Whatever you think might hold your children's attention.
- Skype or Facetime: Friends or relatives can work. They may like to chat, read books to each other, or even play charades or make slime together.
- Audio or recorded books
- Nap or quiet time
- When another caregiver is around to watch your other child.

Over the coming weeks

When you set up regular Special Time, you'll see things become easier over the coming weeks. As your children's trust in the process - and your commitment to it - grows, things begin to shift.

1. Because they have their own, regular time to connect with you, kids will find it easier to share you.
2. And, because they have that time to offload their fears and fill their cups with contentment and security, they will save up letting those big feelings out through play, laughter and tears around Special Time.

You'll find it easier setting up limits when Special Time becomes a regular part of your family routine.

Try Saying:

"It's x turn for Special Time later, and your will be in x."

"It's OK to be upset right now, and it's x's Special Time. I can listen to your upset when we are done."

Look for the Laughter...

Laughter is so good for melting tension, and that helps foster safety and security for your child. That's why we say when there is laughter, do the thing that made them laugh over and over.

Today, think back over the last few times you did Special Time. What did your child laugh most at? What really tickles them? Do they like physical play or silly faces? Jokes or funny voices?

The Indecisive Child...

"My child takes so long to set up Special Time, it feels like we don't even get to play before the timer goes off?"

Here's a question: What if THAT's your child's play?
The decision-making, the direction? The problem-solving?

Even if it doesn't feel like Special Time, even if it doesn't feel like play, you can still DELIGHT in your child after you have called Special Time.

Remember the activity your child chooses doesn't matter. Your ATTENTION does!

But then they get upset!

It's natural that your child might get upset when Special Time ends after spending all that time setting up play.

If this happens, listen to their upset.

There may be some ways to work around this - but we won't guarantee you will avoid the upset. Why?

Your child may actually NEED the upset. That's how they may be using Special Time.

Still, if you think that they do simply need longer, and you can't extend your time, try these ideas:

- Tell your child when Special Time will be ahead of time.
- Give them time to think about what they'd like to do and prepare.
- Not tidying up: If the timer dings and play hasn't happened, if you can, leave the set-up out, or the costumes nearby and ready for next time.
- Reflect: In a peaceful moment, ask your child if there's anything they'd like to change about Special Time.
- Brainstorm: Use the "Special Time Ideas" sheets from your workbook with your child.

Use these ideas and your child will have a bank of ideas ready for next time.

But keep in mind, these kids of ours are smart. Whether it looks how we expect it to or not, your child knows what play will work best for them in the moment.

How Do You Feel About That Crying?

Does your child cry at the end of Special Time?

How does that feel for you?

When a child cries, they can expel their feelings and through the cry. You don't need to shush or distract. If this is new or hard for you - or you'd just like a refresher, read today's post and then write your reaction to it. What feels good, what feels hard? How was crying treated in your house growing up, and how does this feel similar or different to how you'd like crying to be for your child?

To Cheat Or Not To Cheat

Why Special Time is Cheat Time

That's right. Cheat time. Although not for you, but for your kids.

Why do we say this?

Because you may see your child become a complete cheater when the limits are off and Special Time is on.

Cheating is ON!

Cheating is very common in Special Time, whether your child is making up rules (and smashing them) for characters, in board games or during imaginative play.

But where does this leave you? As parents we often feel like we have to teach turns, or teach the ethics of cheating.

But trust that your modelling outside of Special Time is enough.

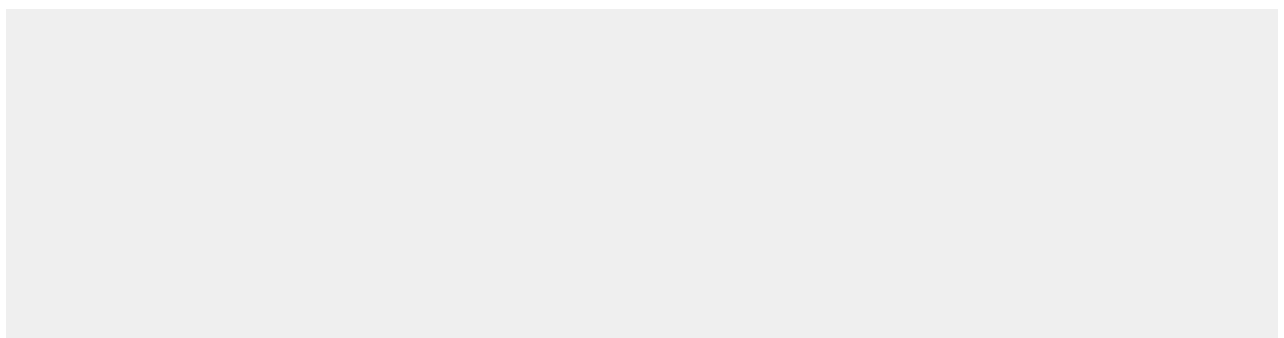
Special Time is a no teach zone, and if you think of it as a freespace for kids to work through issues, you'll be able to spot things your kids may be rubbing up against in reality:

- Unfairness
- Competition
- Winning and losing
- Feelings of failure
- Playing around rules and control

Delight In Them Anyway!

DELIGHT in their creativity and how well they cheat. There's genius in there. There's freedom.

If you do feel bad about it, why might that be? Take that to a listening partner. You can note your immediate feelings below.



Let's Reflect... Some More

What have you loved about Special Time, so far, and why?

What did you find hard, and why do you think this was?

How are you feeling about the next two weeks...

MY FEELINGS ABOUT PLAY

Are you exhausted? Are you worried about other things? Does another child interrupt you? Are you lost about how to play things with your child that you never played?

Think About The Times Play Feels Hard

When you are bored, resistant or heavy about play, think about the best times an adult played with you as a child

SPECIAL TIME IDEAS

NAME:

SPECIAL TIME IDEAS

What Kinds of Things Do I Love to Play?

SPECIAL TIME IDEAS

NAME:

SPECIAL TIME IDEAS

What Kinds of Things Do I Love to Play?

You made it!



Where were you when you started? How do things feel now?



What have you discovered about your child and how they like to play?



How easy or hard was it to stop everything, listen and play?



Set the intention... How do you want to continue?

"Be in the moment" Reflections



What did you play?



What did you notice about your child when they played?



How did it feel to let them take the lead?



Were you able to hold Special Time without any distraction?



How did it feel trying to stay in the moment?