



Using Special Time to explore things that are normally off-limits

I had often heard that Special Time can be used by our children as a way to explore things that are normally off-limits with our approval, and I experienced this recently with my four-year-old son.

He had been “experimenting” with the soap in the bathroom for a while. By this I mean he was tipping all the liquid hand soap into the basin, and emptying the shampoo into the bath. He **did not** have my approval in this!

He also wanted to play with the food colouring in the pantry, but I didn’t want to get stains on the kitchen bench or sink, so refused to let him play with them. I thought my reasons were justified and didn’t think anything more about it until one **Special Time**, when I asked him what he would like to do, and he told me without hesitation that he wanted to play with the food colouring in the sandpit!

Hmmm, I thought, as I weighed up whether I could honour his request.

He has asked to play with it outside – why didn't I think of that? – so I was ok about the mess issue, and we only had the cheap food colouring, so it wasn't expensive to replace if he used it all up.

I decided yes! I'll go with this and I let him know he could choose two colours to take to the sandpit.

Color rush

For the 20 minutes of Special Time that we had together, we both had such a great time! My son LOVED making the sand turn blue and green, and also filled up tubs of water and turned those different colours too! He had my total approval, delight in what he was creating, and enthusiasm for the exploration of new activities. He used up both bottles, and continued playing outside with his creations long after the Special Time had finished.

That was a few months ago. Since then he has asked for one more Special Time like that. We did the same thing again and now has not asked for the food colouring again. Nor has he tipped out the soap or shampoo in the bathroom.

Free from the limit

I think that the opportunity for my son to explore the “off-limit” activity with my approval allowed him to move on from wanting to do those off-limits things. Maybe he didn't have so much of a “need” to push the boundaries as he felt

more connected to me, or perhaps he did just get it out of his system in a safe space and has no desire to do it again.

This experience has also helped me. I feel more open about rules and how they can affect both of us. I could think about how we could make his request work for both of us, rather than just say no because it would make a big mess inside and not meet my needs for keeping the kitchen clean.

Suddenly I saw that there were other ways we could do this activity, and that's something I'll keep in mind when the next "off-limit" request comes up.