

CHILD-PARENT-RELATIONSHIP (C-P-R) TRAINING

Play Session Dos & Don'ts—Session 3

Parents: Your major task is to show genuine and intentional interest in your child's play. You communicate your interest in, and understanding of, your child's thoughts, feelings, and behavior through your words, actions, and undivided focus on your child.

Do:

1. Do set the stage. (Structure for Success!)

- Prepare play area ahead of time (old blanket can be used to establish a visual boundary of the play area, as well as provide protection for flooring; a cookie sheet under the arts/crafts materials provides a hard surface for Play-Doh, drawing, and gluing and provides ease of clean up).
- Display the toys in a consistent manner around the perimeter of the play area.
- Convey freedom as you introduce your special playtime to your child: "**During our special playtime, you can play with the toys in lots of the ways you'd like to.**"
- Allow your child to lead by returning responsibility to your child using responses, such as "That's up to you," "You can decide," or "That can be whatever you want it to be."

2. Do let your child lead.

- Allowing your child to lead during the playtime helps you to better understand your child's world and what your child needs from you.
- Communicate your willingness to follow your child's lead through your responses: "Show me what you want me to do," "You want me to put that on," "Hmmm . . ." or "I wonder . . ."
- Use whisper technique (co-conspirators) when child wants you to play a role: "What should I say?" or "What happens next?" (Modify responses for older kids: use conspiratorial tone, "What happens now?" "What kind of teacher am I?" etc.)

3. Do join in your child's play actively and playfully, as a follower.

- Convey your willingness to follow your child's lead through your responses and your actions, by actively joining in the play (child is the director, parent is the actor) using responses such as "So I'm supposed to be the teacher," "You want me to be the robber, and I'm supposed to wear the black mask," "Now I'm supposed to pretend I'm locked up in jail, until you say I can get out," or "You want me to stack these just as high as yours."
- You can also use the whisper technique described above.

4. Do verbally track the child's play (describe what you see).

- Verbally tracking your child's play is a way of letting your child know that you are paying close attention and that you are interested and involved.
- Use observational responses, such as "You're filling that all the way to the top," "You've decided you want to paint next," or "You've got 'em all lined up just how you want them."

5. Do reflect your child's feelings.

- Verbally reflecting children's feelings helps them feel understood and communicates your acceptance of their feelings and needs.
- Use reflective responses, such as "You're proud of your picture," "That kinda surprised you," "You really like how that feels on your hands," "You really wish that we could play longer," "You don't like the way that turned out," or "You sound disappointed." (*Hint: Look closely at your child's face to better identify how your child is feeling.*)

6. Do set firm and consistent limits.

- Consistent limits create a structure for a safe and predictable environment for children.
- Children should never be permitted to hurt themselves or you.
- Limit setting provides an opportunity for your child to develop self-control and self-responsibility.
- Using a calm, patient, yet firm voice, say, "I know you're having fun, but *the carpet's not for putting Play-Doh on; you can play with it on the tray*" or "I know you'd like to shoot the gun at me, but *I'm not for shooting. You can choose to shoot at that*" (point to something acceptable).

7. Do salute the child's power and encourage effort.

- Verbally recognizing and encouraging your child's effort builds self-esteem and confidence and promotes self-motivation.
- Use self-esteem-building responses, such as "You worked hard on that!" "You did it!" "You figured it out!" "You've got a plan for how you're gonna set those up," "You know just how you want that to be," or "Sounds like you know lots about how to take care of babies."

8. Do be verbally active.

- Being verbally active communicates to your child that you are interested and involved in her play. If you are silent, your child will feel watched.
- *Note: Empathic grunts—"Hmm . . ." and so forth—also convey interest and involvement, when you are unsure of how to respond.*

Don't:

1. Don't criticize any behavior.
2. Don't praise the child.
3. Don't ask leading questions.
4. Don't allow external interruptions of the session.
5. Don't give information or teach.
6. Don't preach.
7. Don't initiate new activities.
8. Don't be passive or quiet.

(Don'ts 1-7 are taken from Guernsey, 1972.)

Remember the "Be-With" Attitudes: Your intent in your responses is what is most important. Convey to your child:

"I am here—I hear you—I understand—I care—I delight in you!"

Reminder: These play session skills (the new skills you are applying) are relatively meaningless if applied mechanically and not as an attempt to be genuinely empathic and truly understand your child. **Your Intent and Attitude Are More Important Than Your Words!**