

Enjoying your child isn't always very easy. Difficult behaviors, like whining and tantrums, can seem to outweigh the fun times. And when you feel overwhelmed, exhausted, and angry, things can get to the point where you just don't feel very positive about your child and may not want to spend time with them.

And yet--spending positive time with your child is an important part of their development. It can increase:

- Self-esteem
- Confidence
- Sense of mastery
- Social competence

Many people also feel that the more shared, positive experiences you have with your child, the *easier* discipline becomes. Children can be more likely to follow directions and cooperate if they have established a strong, positive attachment with their parent. In fact, many child development experts feel that a positive attachment should be in place *before* trying a new discipline strategy.

Here are some suggestions to help you have a more positive connection when playing with your child:

Before playing with your child:

1. Spend 5 minutes thinking about what you like about your child.
2. Remember 3 fun times you've had in the past with your child.
3. Accept that enjoying your children can take effort. Remember that the effort is worth it.

When playing with your child:

1. **Enter the play without directing it.** Some parents don't like playing with their children because they find children's games boring to play. You can try a therapist's trick to help you get involved: instead of just watching your child play, enter the play, but stay on the sidelines. Do this by repeating back to your child what you just saw them do. Say things in a non-judgmental way. Say it like you were making a really good story from what you see. For example: "I see that you are rushing the fire truck to the fire. You are putting out that fire! The fireman just fell out of that truck. Now the truck runs over the fire man." You don't have to narrate every single minute. Do a few sentences. Then watch a bit. Then narrate again.
2. **Don't turn play into school or work.** Although it may sometimes be appropriate to use a play situation to teach a lesson, the goal of this type of play is to have fun. So don't worry about the play needing to be educational. And only stop the play if there is something unsafe happening.



Child Development: Enjoying Your Child

3. **You are the adult.** Some parents get so caught up in playing that they forget that they are the adult. Remember your goal: to have fun with your child. Not to win a game, not to outsmart or outdo. To have fun is the end goal.
4. **End it before it fails.** Whatever you are doing: free play, art, listening to the radio together—end it on a high note. Give your child 3 reminders, spaced 5 minutes apart. Let them know that you are having fun with them, but that you will need to finish the play soon. If they whine, cry or plead for more: simply validate their feelings. Say: “I know, I know, endings are hard. You are sad about this.”
5. **Thank your child** for the time you spent together. This will show your child that you value them, and think that they are worthy of your time and energy.

For more tips, or if you need more information or would like to talk to someone:
In Washington State: Call the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-HOPE
Outside of Washington State: contact your local Circle of Parents agency at
www.circleofparents.org