

Handout for Session 1: Nondirective Special Time

The purpose of this home practice assignment is to help improve your relationship with your youth, improve parent child bonding and increase you and your child's enjoyment of each other. If you work at improving your relationship with your child, then the child will be more motivated to please you and will be more likely to respond appropriately when you do need to use discipline. A strong parent child relationship has been shown to decrease the likelihood of future problems such as depression, anxiety, delinquency, school drop out and substance abuse.

We suggest picking a regular time each day to spend about 15 to 20 minutes for nondirective special time with your child. No other children should be present during the nondirective special time because they are likely to become jealous and interrupt. You can set up this time by saying to your child, "I have 20 minutes free and I would like to do something with you. What would you like to do?" Another option is to just hang around while your child is engaged in some activity and to make positive comments on what the child is doing.

Watching TV does not count as a nondirective special time because there would be too little interaction between you and your child. Look for chances to enthusiastically praise your child's activities. You should not take control of the activity or direct it. Let the child take the lead. Try to plan the special time during a part of the day when you can forget about other worries. During this time you should avoid asking questions and give no commands. Questions are often a subtle way parents use to influence or control a conversation. It is all right to ask innocent questions to clarify what a child is doing, or to show interest, but do not ask many questions as they can interrupt the activity.

Do not use this time to teach your child the correct way to play a game such as checkers. If you wish to teach your child the correct way to play, do so another time. Stick to being positive and nondirective with your comments. Look for opportunities to praise your child. Praise has more impact if it is specific, accurate and honest. Your child will beam if he or she feels that they are the center of your positive attention.

If your youth misbehaves, simply turn away and look elsewhere briefly. As soon as your child is being appropriate turn to them immediately and give approval. If the misbehavior continues or is fairly serious, then tell your child that special time is over and that you will do something with them again another time. Then leave the room. Most children do not misbehave during Nondirective Special Time.

Nondirective Special Time sounds easy, but many parents find it difficult to do. Parents have a tendency to ask too many questions or give in to the temptation to teach the child the "right way to do it." Children often do not have many opportunities where they can legitimately have power. This is one time where you can give control to them. Don't worry if you make mistakes; just try harder next time to work on your positive attention skill.