VERMONT Consultation & Psychiatry Access PROGRAM

Supporting Pediatric and Perinatal Providers

CAREGIVERS GUIDE

SPECIAL TIME WITH CHILDREN

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Spending **regular, intentional time together** is an important way for caregivers to build and maintain a strong connection with their children. Positive shared experiences create a foundation that families can draw on during times of conflict, stress, or behavioral challenges. Regular connection can also help interrupt negative patterns of interaction and build motivation for positive change.

Make it regular and protect the time. Ideally, schedule special time daily or weekly and make an effort to provide individual time with each child in the household.

Keep it simple. Special time can be as short as 15 minutes. Put it on the family calendar when possible, set aside phones and other distractions, and focus on being together.

Keep the connection unconditional. Special time should continue even after a hard day or when there have been behavioral challenges. Maintaining positive connection can be especially important during difficult periods.

Let your child take the lead. Whenever possible, let your child choose an activity that you can both enjoy. It does not need to cost money or be elaborate, and it should not involve chores, homework, or other responsibilities.

Stick with it if your child is hesitant. Some children may initially resist or not know how to respond to this new routine. You might start by sitting alongside your child while they play or simply letting them know that you have set aside this time for them and they are welcome to join you.

Follow your child's interests. Choose activities that fit your child's age, interests, skills, and abilities. The goal is positive interaction and connection, not choosing the "perfect" activity.

IDEAS FOR SPECIAL TIME

- Play a game
- Have a dance party
- Color, draw, or make art
- Cook or bake together
- Do a craft
- Take a walk
- Plant or tend a garden
- Read together
- Build something together
- Have your child teach you about something they enjoy

A note about language: If “special time” does not feel natural for your family, call it something else, such as “dedicated time,” “quality time,” or simply “our time.” What matters is setting aside regular, intentional time to connect with your child.

ADAPTED FROM: *Seattle Children’s PALS “Family Special Time” handout.*

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