

Fecha's Play Therapy presents

Connecting with your child

An Info Pack for Parents
Part 1 of 3



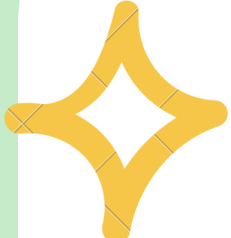
Introduction

Welcome to our info pack on how to connect with your child. Our aim here at Play Therapy is to help you build a strong relationship with your child.

Parents that struggle with their parenting responsibilities negatively impact their children. Harmful experiences during childhood can be very damaging to your child's developing brain. You can mitigate this by improving and adapting your parenting skills.



Why Play Therapy?

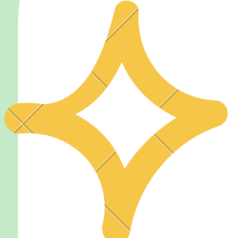


Play therapy is a long-standing alternative therapy treatment option for children and the consensus among child psychiatrists and psychologist is that playtime can often be used to help children learn, reduce anxiety and improve self-esteem. This is because children can express themselves without needing to talk.

The play serves only as a bridge to therapy. Play therapists often stress that simply having some toys in a therapy office or encouraging children to draw or play with blocks as they talk with a counsellor or psychologist is not play therapy.

Children are doing real work in the play therapy room.


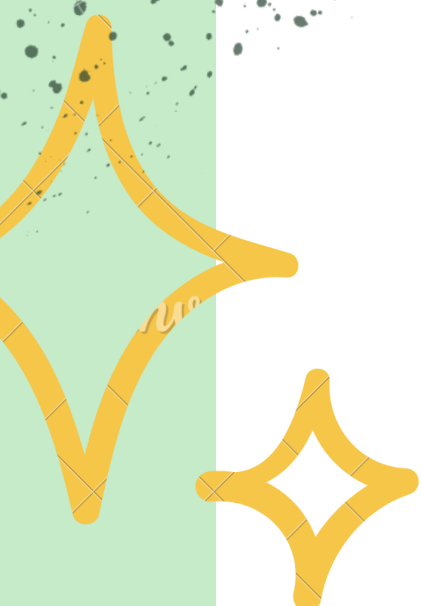
How does Play Therapy work?



Play Therapy begins by helping children express their feelings and assume responsibility for all of their behaviours. It teaches them how to develop problem-solving skills.

It is important to remember that Play therapists are trained mental health practitioners specializing in helping young children. One of the questions I ask parents is, "How will you know when your child has changed and no longer has this problem?" The reason I do this is to establish a benchmark for change.

It is essential for me as a therapist to develop goals with parents before starting therapy as it allows us to assess change and monitor behavioural outcomes.



When I have a young child deemed "out of control" at home and school, I build a relationship with the child. During the session, the child will learn to assume responsibility for his/her decisions and will have opportunities to demonstrate self-control if setting limits is necessary for the play therapy session. In this way, parents begin to recognize that what occurs in the nondirective playroom becomes helpful in addressing issues arising at home and school. In the example above, goals were established that specified how many days each week the child would comply with their mother's requests, not have a tantrum at home, and not hit themselves.

Your child will learn how to have empathy and respect for the feelings of others, regulate their own emotions, manage their reactions, increase problem-solving abilities, form connections with people, increase their ability to express themselves, and increase their knowledge of themselves.



We created this info pack as a sort of toolkit for parents. The idea of it is to be a starting resource for connecting with your child. We hope that you will find this useful as you begin your journey of connecting intentionally with your child.

If you have any questions, please write to me at fechayap@therapyinc.com.sg



How do you get your child to listen?

We've all been there! You find yourself having to yell at the top of your lungs to get your children to listen and do as they're told! Phew, wee! All that frustration coursing through your veins! Whether you're parenting a headstrong child or you find that every single time you have to be authoritative with your children they push back and test the boundaries, then we have three easy-to-follow strategies you can use to get your child to listen!



1. Attention



2. No Judgement, No Shame, and No Guilt



3. Empathise

How do you get your child to listen?

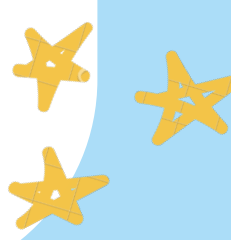


1. Attention

When you need your child to listen or comply with instructions it's important that you do so in a space where your child can listen and see you physically.

Get down to their level, give them a pat on the shoulder, and make eye contact.

Now, let's start with an example, say you're running late and you need your children to put on their shoes and get out the door. Of course, they're kicking up a fuss wanting 5 more minutes of playtime. Go up to your child, get down to their level, and before you say anything. The key is to not use words that will trigger a denial or a tantrum. Words like "I need you to", "Stop", "you cannot.". Say things like "Hey, I think it's time to put these toys away!, we're going to [...], let's get your shoes and socks on, which pair would you like to wear?" A simple positive and deflect to get your child out of the door without a fuss!



How do you get your child to listen?

2. No Judgement, No Shame, and No Guilt

Your child will have some very big emotions. Often parents do not want to deal with these big emotions, they will say things that are quite invalidating to what the child is feeling. For example, a parent might say "Go to your room!" or "Stop crying".

When you respond rather than react to your child's emotional outbursts you hold space for your child to express the emotions they feel, their ideas, and feelings about the situation without any criticism, shame, or guilt. This is important as their brains are still developing and their learning how to regulate their emotional states. Meeting their outbursts with an explosive reaction of your own is truly unproductive.

As you develop this practice, you will teach your child important social and emotional skills by being firm, respectful, and clearly set expectations for their behaviour.

How do you get your child to listen?

3. Empathise

Another strategy that we often present to parents is labeling. When your child is meeting you with defiance or constantly testing the boundaries with you, there could be underlying challenges in how they are expressing themselves. We encourage parents to empathise with their children. If you see your child getting upset with having to put away their toys to get ready for school you can say things like " I see that you're upset. I know how much you like playing with your toys". Identify what your child is feeling and factually state what they're doing in a matter-of-fact way. When you do this, you make your child feel seen and heard, incidentally are great ingredients for cooperation!


Finally, once you have your child's full attention, you've responded rather than reacting and empathized with them, it's time to restate what you want them to do! Keep your language positive and re-direct! You can say things like "Alright, let's drop these toys in the box and wash our hands!" "Say see you later! It's time for some yummy dinner!"

How do you get your child to listen?

As a parent, it is important to keep in mind that no matter what strategies we use, yes even the ones we listed out, your child will not listen to you 100% all the time. This is ok. Your child is developing and growing and constantly testing the boundaries. Which is a developmental milestone.

When your child does not listen, you might insist that they comply with your instructions. However, as you know when you force someone to do something they lose their moral agency. But most importantly your child does not see any value in the behaviour you wish them to exhibit. When they comply anyway out of fear of punishment or because the person who might punish is present, they are not likely to learn good behaviours but rebel in the future or choose not to behave unless the threat of punishment is there. Use force only when a child could get hurt or when a child might hurt another.

These strategies work. But, they take practice before they become second nature. And, even when they do become second nature, there are still times you won't perfectly execute.



Children don't
say, "I had a hard
day, can we talk?"
They say, "Will
you play with me?"

Lawrence Cohen

Play therapy is helpful with emotionally regulating children and you are instrumental to your child's development.

A Play therapist does not only work with your child; they work with you too. They teach you skills to help you respond to your child in a way that enhances your relationship with them.

Think of it as a tool to help your child feel more accepted and be able to express their feelings in safe and appropriate ways with you.

5 ways to get your child to listen.

A lot of us growing up may not have had parents who modeled how to work through difficult emotions for us. In an ideal world, we would have all had parents who mirrored our emotional states by saying things like "I can see that you are frustrated" or "I can see that you are sad" to teach us to how to cope with our emotions.

Well, what has this got to do with our children listening to us?

This process of simply labeling our emotional states would have taught us how to self-soothe, where we regulate our emotions in healthy ways that allow us to calm down. When we are calm, we process information better and respond to situations differently.



5 ways to get your child to listen.

1. Has all your child's basic needs been met?

When your child isn't listening, it's important to ask:

- Have they eaten enough, slept enough, or had enough downtime?
- Do they feel connected to me? Have I been listening and paying attention to them?
- Are they overstimulated?

It may seem obvious but children are simple creatures in this sense. A happy healthy child has all their immediate needs met. Most of the time their behaviour can be attributed to the fact that they are hungry, in need of a nap, or want your full undivided attention, if only for 10 to 15 mins of doing something they enjoy with you.

5 ways to get your child to listen.

2. The power of positive phrasing.

Now this will take some practice but the truth is positive language is easier to listen to than negative language.

Research has shown that children find it less pleasant and more challenging to follow instructions when parents use negative language. This is because the child needs to listen to what you have said and deduce what he or she should be doing instead. While this may be obvious for an adult, for a little person who is loving the excitement of drawing all over the walls, it is more challenging.

*Instead of: Don't run.
Try: Walk, please.*

*Instead of: Stop touching.
Try: Hands to self.*

*Instead of: You're not listening.
Try: I need good listening from you.*

5 ways to get your child to listen.

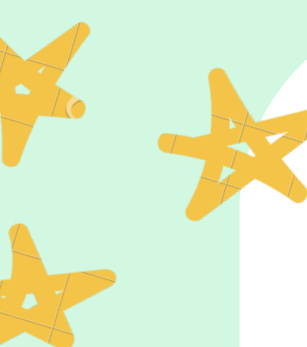
3. Connect with your child first then direct them.

Consider being at work where your manager has come up to you and told you that you have to present at a meeting in 10 mins. Chances are, you would feel a little blindsided, having not known about the meeting or what you have to present.

Children respond similarly when we tell them what to do without any appreciation of their perspective. By connecting with your child before directing them to do something, you increase compliance.

For example, instead of, "Clean up your lego. It's time for dinner." Try, "Look at your Lego spaceship! You've really worked hard to put this together. It's time to put it away and set the table for dinner." (This is the equivalent of your manager coming up to you, acknowledging your recent ideas, sharing that they think management will be open to implementing it and if you could share these ideas with them.)

5 ways to get your child to listen.

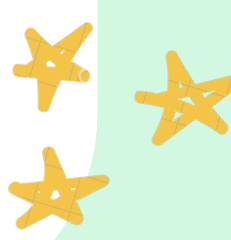


By appreciating what they're doing, your child will feel respected and will be more inclined to cooperate with you. This approach will take a lot of practice, but the more you use this approach with your child, the more it will feel like second nature.

The second part of this approach is to direct not request. Unless you want a yes or no answer, never ask a question. This means you have to stop saying things like:

- Can we clean this up? Or,
- Can you help mummy set the table before dinner?

A common misconception about positive parenting is that it is passive, in fact, it is far from. You are still the parent and the one in charge! The only difference from other parenting styles is that you show respect for your child while being in charge.



5 ways to get your child to listen.



4. Stop lecturing. Try using minimal language instead.

Less is more when it comes to effectively disciplining children. The more you repeat or nag at your child, they become less and less receptive to what we want them to do.

Instead of saying: "You left your shoes on the floor. I told you to put them away in the shoe rack." Try: "Shoes."

Or, instead of: "What are you doing? I told you to start your homework fifteen minutes ago. You're still in front of the TV!" Try: "Homework."

Most of the time, children know when they've forgotten or ignored expectations. A reminder is much more effective and goes a longer way than them being berated.



5 ways to get your child to listen.

5. Work with your child not against them.

If a child is looking overwhelmed, unfocused, or simply struggling, your support likely is just what they need. Whether it's working beside them as they do their homework or cleaning up with them as they do their chores, everything becomes easier with a bit of scaffolding.

Over time, as you build the connection with your child, you should see your child independently act on your directions. Remember to stay positive with your little one!



“It’s not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”

Ann Landers



As a parent, you should allow your child to live joyfully and allow them the space to make mistakes, grow and prove their own merit. Enjoy the journey for what it is. No one on planet earth is perfect. There is no single person who has excelled in all the fields of performance, be it sports or academics. A positive approach and motivating children without comparing, criticism, and judgment help them become confident and successful individuals.

How connecting with your child improves behaviour.

No universal guidebook to parenting tells you how exactly you should raise your child. Often parents develop styles over time, referencing things they've experienced as they grew up and continuing it on with their children.

This can work out great or not so great depending on their (parent's) individual experiences. For example, if you grew up in a household where resting or relaxing was considered "lazy" then it makes sense that you would feel ashamed or guilty when you feel tired, want to take a break, or need time for yourself. Sometimes we may repeat these experiences with our own children.



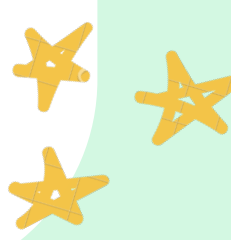
How connecting with your child improves behaviour.



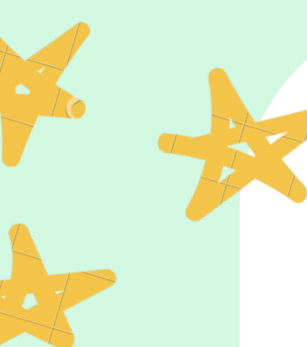
What does connecting with your child have to do with parenting?

Connecting with your child is an approach to parenting that places a deep emphasis on being partners with your child. Making building a connection with your child a priority makes parents become aware of their own behaviours which they model to their children, welcome emotional expression, and fully accept a child as a capable being. Building a connection calls on you to make reflections on the amount of compassion with which you treat yourself and your child.

We know that children learn by modeling behaviour from their parents, we know that each child is independent of us and we want them to feel loved and seen. This is where empathy, understanding, and respect come into the picture.

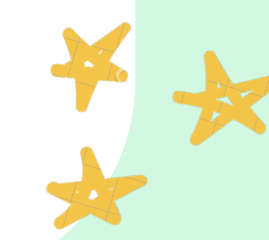


How connecting with your child improves behaviour.




Being able to actively listen to your child is a powerful tool for building a strong relationship with your child. A relationship where they can come to you in times of true need and open up to you. Simple things like kneeling and getting down to their eye level, making eye contact, and reaching out to touch their arm or hold their hand when they're upset not only communicate that they have your full attention but that you also empathise and understand their situation.

Make it your priority to know what your children are hoping for, what they're afraid of, and what they feel anxious about. Listen and ask some questions, even if they change the subject, be gentle and demonstrate that you care. When you do these things, you show a great amount of respect to your child.

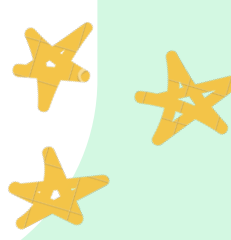


How connecting with your child improves behaviour.




When we talk about child development, we often talk about how important the child's environment is and what they need to grow into healthy adults. If you've grown up in an environment where negative emotions like sadness, pain, or anger have been met with dismissal by your parents, or adults around you, you subconsciously form a connection between expressing negative emotions and that being not great for your environment. You begin repressing your feelings or stop paying attention to how you really feel about a situation. This then becomes a way of life for you.

As you get older and start forming intimate relationships, your partners may complain that you don't express how you feel about them. Or you may notice that you have a heightened awareness of other people's emotional states and often think about how they would react rather than where you stand with things. You may people-please or even push people away.

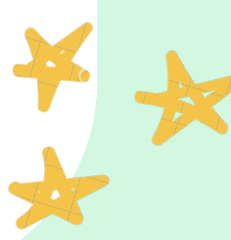


How connecting with your child improves behaviour.



When your child feels secure in their relationship with you they are increasingly able to self-regulate their emotions. Children learn the most through their environment and their experiences. They repeat the things you say, and most importantly, they tend to "copy" your behaviour. Practice naming your emotions as they happen around your child. For example, if something has made you angry, start by identifying the feeling. Then do a breathing technique to calm yourself down. When you have settled down, talk about the incident, express what made you angry, and now that you're in a calmer state of mind, point out how you will go about responding to the situation.

You've now set an excellent example and framework for managing one's emotions. It shows your child that it is possible to experience a whole host of emotions and deal with them in an appropriate manner instead of letting a feeling take over and be a driving factor in your response to a situation.



“The sign of
great parenting
is not the
child’s behavior.”

The sign of truly
great parenting
is the
parent’s behavior.”

– *Andy Smithson*

 truparenting.net

How to change your phrasing when talking to your child.

Swap commands for an invitation to work together. Changing the way you ask questions that encourages your child to work collaboratively with you. A command sounds like "Tie your shoes", an alternative would ask, "Should we tie our shoes so we don't trip?"

Try these phrases with your child today.

Instead of: No, you can't have another cookie.

Try: Yes, you can have one again tomorrow.

Instead of: Stop interrupting.

Try: Wait until I'm done.

Instead of: No more TV.

Try: You can watch your show after your homework.



How to change your phrasing when talking to your child.

Instead of: Stop whining.

Try: Copy my voice. (Then say what your child say calmly).

Instead of: Don't cry.

Try: Come see me.

Instead of: Leave him alone!

Try: Come play with me.



Instead of: Don't/Stop throwing!

Try: Put it on the ground please.

Instead of: Don't hit.

Try: Gentle touches please.

Instead of: Stop shouting!

Try: Can we use our inside voices please?



**IF YOU DON'T RESPECT
YOUR CHILDREN WHEN
YOU ARE FRUSTRATED,
YOU CAN'T EXPECT
THEM TO RESPECT YOU
WHEN THEY ARE
FRUSTRATED.**

- AMANDA ERICKSON



Thank You

This is Part 1 of 3, check our website for the next part of this info pack series!

