

PARENT HANDOUT: BONDING TIME



Disruptive Behavior Skill 1

WHAT IS BONDING TIME?

- ▶ Bonding Time is reserving 5-20 minutes a day to connect with your child in an uninterrupted and focused way, like playing a game or sport together, in order to strengthen your relationship.
- ▶ During this time, your child gets to choose and lead the activity, ideally an interactive one you can engage in together. Your goal is to focus on what your child is doing and respond to their actions in an attentive, enthusiastic, and positive way.
- ▶ Some ideas for Bonding Time activities include playing with toys or a game, drawing or crafting, and throwing a ball back and forth. Older children tend to prefer more interactive activities, such as playing a sport, making a meal together, going for a walk or to the coffee shop, or having a conversation about things they enjoy, such as music, movies, sports, or their hobbies.
- ▶ Less interactive activities like watching TV are not as effective, because they provide fewer opportunities for you to participate in your child's play and give positive feedback.
- ▶ This practice can lead to positive results for children of all ages, but is often most effective with younger children.

HERE'S HOW TO USE BONDING TIME AT HOME

- 1 **Schedule a regular time** for Bonding Time, or join when your child is doing an activity you where can participate. Try to do this at least 3-5 times per week.
- 2 **Ask what your child would like to do together.** Encourage them to choose an interactive activity, and let them lead it.
- 3 **Put on your enthusiastic hat and attitude!** Pay attention to your child's actions and show eagerness and interest. For younger children, you can provide a detailed, running commentary of what you see ("I see you're putting the blue car on top of the red block"; "Now you're drawing a big castle!"). For older children, focus on being attentive and enthusiastic about your child's actions or interests while doing an activity they enjoy together ("I like the way you tried to dunk the ball"; "Tell me more about that band"; or saying "Wow, that's such a great strategy" while playing a game with your child).
- 4 **Provide positive feedback.** Let your child know you are interested in them, show approval for good behavior ("Nice job taking turns"; "I like when we spend time together like this"), and show affection in ways that are comfortable for you (give a hug, high five, or pat on the head or shoulder). Be specific about what you like in your child's actions ("I like it when you show me how to draw these animals"; "I love how good you are at playing soccer").
- 5 **Try not to criticize your child, ask questions, or give directions.** Avoid using words like "don't," "no," "stop," and "quit." Bonding Time is not the time to scold your child or teach new skills.
- 6 It is important that your child have your **undivided attention**. Don't start Bonding Time when you're cooking a meal, on the phone, or about to leave for a meeting or errand. If you have other children, Bonding Time works best when they are doing other activities. Some parents like to have Bonding Time with each of their children.
- 7 Remember to **relax and have fun!** This is a great opportunity to spend positive time together and feel closer to your child.

PARENT HANDOUT: BONDING TIME TIPS



HOW CAN BONDING TIME HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ When children misbehave, we want to increase their motivation to behave. Bonding Time teaches children to enjoy getting attention from parents for good behavior.
- ▶ We are all affected by the attention we receive. When you do well at work, it feels good to have your boss praise your efforts, even though you may simply be “doing your job”. Children respond well to attention for good behavior too, even if they are doing what they are “supposed to do”.
- ▶ It may seem counterintuitive, but giving children attention for misbehavior (like scolding) can still be rewarding. For many children, any attention is “good attention”. In fact, parents often pay more attention to children when they act out than when they are behaving!
- ▶ Your relationship with your child may sometimes feel less positive if you are dealing with a lot of misbehavior. Bonding Time provides your family with opportunities to repair and improve the parent-child relationship. It gives you time each day that is conflict-free and increases the effectiveness of other parenting skills. With this, you can “reset” your relationship.



COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

I'm busy! How will I fit this in?

A small investment of time now can lead to big rewards later. You likely spend a lot of time now managing your child's misbehavior. Putting aside even 5 minutes a day to bond can help you spend less time arguing and more time enjoying your child. If needed, parents can take turns.

Why am I the one doing something different when my child is the one misbehaving?

We all do better when we receive encouragement and appreciation from others. It is hard for us to keep working when our good behavior goes unnoticed, even if we aren't always on our “best” behavior. This skill will help motivate your child to get attention by behaving in ways you like.

This is hard!

Many families find this challenging at first. It gets easier (and more fun!) with practice. If it doesn't go as well as you want, you can always try again. Many families choose to continue doing this even after their children's behavior problems get better.

Can my partner or other child(ren) join in?

Bonding Time is most effective with one parent and one child. This allows you to devote all of your attention to your child. If possible, each parent can have their own Bonding Time.

What if my child misbehaves during Bonding Time?

Try to ignore mild misbehavior like whining or complaining. Handle serious misbehavior by ending Bonding Time and saying you look forward to doing it again when your child acts more appropriately. Once your child acts in a way you like, praise it (“Thank you for playing nicely”; “I like it when you talk to me in a polite way”).

What if my child misbehaves during the day? Can I take Bonding Time away?

Do not take Bonding Time away as a punishment. Ideally, it becomes part of your daily routine. When children have a bad day, they usually need more soothing and positive time with parents, not less. Over time, this special time will help decrease your child's misbehavior.