

# My Child's Time



Spending one-on-one time with your child regularly communicates that you think your child is important. My Child's Time — a regular, uninterrupted time for self-expression — will help build or maintain your relationship. This time together builds a foundation of trust and understanding. Your child will value your dedicated attention as well as the chance to take a turn being in charge of an activity together. Try spending at least five minutes of interactive time together most days and more when possible, such as on a weekend. During this time, allow your child to take the lead. Plan to do My Child's Time when you won't have anything else distracting you or demanding your attention.

## How do we start?

### You might want to say something like:

*I want to start having "Olivia Time." Every day, you and I will spend five minutes together, just the two of us. You can choose whether we play games, talk or do an activity. Olivia Time will be time just for us. Let's start today at 5 pm after you're done with your homework. How does that sound?*

### Set a timer during My Child's Time.

To begin, provide two or three suggestions for your child. Eventually your child will probably look forward to and plan the activity ahead of time.

### Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Check in with your child about something unique about his/her day:
  - Did a friend do something funny today?
  - Did you experience something that surprised you today?
  - Do you want to share something you're proud of?
  - What are you grateful for today?
  - What's your favorite song or artist right now?
  - What do you think of the recent news on ... ?
- See who can come up with the funniest or most thoughtful thing to ask the other person.
- Play a silly game of taking turns coming up with "Would you rather?" scenarios (e.g., Would you rather have the superpower to jump 50 feet high or to be invisible for 15 seconds?).
- Play "I'm thinking of something" where one person thinks of a person, place or thing, and the other person can only ask questions with yes-or-no answers to figure out what the "something" is.
- Play a board game or create your own board game together.
- Work on a puzzle.
- Play a video game together — but make sure it's interactive, such as a puzzle or trivia game.
- Read from a book or article of your child's choosing.
- Make up a story together where you each take turns saying one sentence.
- Draw a picture together where you take turns adding to it.
- Draw a picture together where one person draws a scribble and the other person has to make the scribble into a drawing and give it a caption.
- Create a collage.
- Make a meal or snack together; allow your child to choose the menu.
- Pick out a food at the grocery store or farmer's market your family hasn't eaten before. Explore ways to prepare it together.
- Play catch with a ball or Frisbee, or kick a ball back and forth.
- Do yoga together.

- Have a dance party while listening to your child’s favorite song together or take turns listening to each other’s favorite songs.
- Build a fort.
- Use your imagination to create an obstacle course in your home. For example, put pieces of paper and pillows on a rug and pretend the rug is hot lava. Try to get across the rug without falling in.
- Have a “thumb war.”
- Go to a park together.
- Share a special treat together.

Occasionally make comments about what you’re doing and discussing, like a narrator, that reflect that you’re paying attention to your child and this time together. As you build memories every day, talk about favorite times that you know your child enjoyed or that you enjoyed: *“Remember when we . . . it was so funny when. . .”*

## Keep rules to a minimum

Let your child know that there are just two rules during his/her time: What you do has to be something that you do together, and it has to be safe. If your child suggests something unsafe, suggest a safe alternative.

## Pile on the praise

Immediately give positive verbal or non-verbal attention when your child exhibits a behavior you like and would like to see more. Praise can range from enthusiastic “cheerleading” to a low-key acknowledgement. Be specific about what you notice and praise whenever you can.

During My Child’s Time, try to provide praise once each minute.

Examples of verbal praise include:

- Thanks for sharing that with me.
- It’s fun to hear about who you admire.
- I appreciate your thoughtfulness.
- I like how you put that together.
- That’s a nice way of doing that.
- I love your sense of humor.
- Nice job setting up the pieces for our game.

Examples of non-verbal praise are: smiles, high-fives, a loving touch and giving a “thumbs up.”

Praise lets your child know that you value what he/she is doing and makes it more likely that he/she will repeat what you are praising. Best of all, it boosts your child’s self-confidence and strengthens your bond. Plus, you’re modeling this behavior so your child is more likely to provide praise to others, which will strengthen his/her relationships. Praising your child during this focused time will also help you practice getting into the habit of noticing what you like to see from your child and acknowledging it.

## How to fit in My Child’s Time when you’re busy

If you don’t feel like you have time for My Child’s Time every day, build it into your regular routine. It might cut down on your options of what you can do, but you can still dedicate time just to your child. Ask your child to lead a game the two of you can play during your car ride home, such as counting cows (red cars) or playing the “alphabet” game (finding letters on signs in the order of the alphabet). Make My Child’s Time part of your bedtime routine by giving three options of calm activities to do together before your child brushes his/her teeth. See if there are chores you can do and enjoy together, such as taking the family dog for a walk and naming everything you can think of that starts with “S” on your walk.