



Playing with My Child Can Do What??

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

Parents are often encouraged to play targeted games with their children. Helping them learn their colors will make them smarter. Teach your child to read at an early age. Adding and subtracting at the age of 2 will give them a leg up in the world. And much of this is fabulous advice, mainly because you are spending time with your child. But there is so much more to the learning process that will prove successful for your little one that doesn't focus on academics at all.

Children's ability to learn new material is often predicated on their ability to listen and follow directions. OK. So that might make you think that increasing the rules in your interactions with your child will help them practice this skill and be the way to go.

However, according to NPR, "It might sound counterintuitive, but one strategy widely recommended by children's health professionals is to engage your child in short, daily sessions of child-led play.

Called "special time," it gives young children a chance to interact with their parents without the stress of having to follow directions — which in turn, strengthens the bond between them, says [Roger Harrison](#), a pediatric psychologist with Nemours Children's Health in Wilmington, Del.

"Special time increases opportunities for closeness between a parent and child. As that attachment is building, it increases the likelihood that a child is going to listen or value what a parent has to say," he says.



How perfect is that? This unstructured time with children gives them the ability to make their own decisions, placing them in charge. Where should the blocks go? What should the tower look like? What if I do it this way? These countless decisions are the basis for problem solving and independence. Coupled with bonding with parents at home and with teachers at school these opportunities are priceless.

I think about my own children. They spend a lot of time at school and they need to complete tasks a certain way - tests, math problems, reading comprehension, to name a few. And then homework continues these structured moments when they come home. But when it is just us, at home, that is when the important learning happens. The questions and figuring out the answers. The smiles and inside jokes that we share. The silly moments and laughs. While we treasure these times, how much more are they getting that I don't expect?

What will your "special time" look like? How can you add more of it into your life, your week, your day? Give this gift to your little ones when you can. You will reap the benefits in so many ways not only for your peace of mind but for their growth and development both right now and later in life!

Shabbat Shalom.