How Parents Can Avoid Parenting Time Traps

Tith the busy pace of today's family life from long workdays to after-school activities, parents may wonder whether their children are deprived of important attention. There are ways to efficiently manage family time to ensure a child's healthy development.

What can busy parents do?

- **Have** realistic expectations for yourself. Even a baby should spend time independently. Provide attractive, stimulating objects in a baby's sleeping area. A safe crib mobile encourages kicking and reaching. Sturdy books and stuffed animals offer opportunities for using hands and eyes in quiet play.
- Offer new challenges. For a crawling baby, a kitchen chair placed upside down becomes an entirely new object of exploration, and sofa cushions placed on the floor become an exciting obstacle course.
- **Supervise** a toddler's play activities from a distance. Come into the room frequently to comment or praise. Call out to the baby from another room to maintain contact.
- **Have** realistic expectations for your children. Learn the age ranges in which you can expect your child to achieve such milestones as sleeping through the night, eating solid food, walking, talking, and becoming toilet-trained.
- **Be prepared** for setbacks. Tired, cranky, or ill children return to old habits. Life changes, such as a new baby or a change of babysitters, may require time for adjustment.

- **Reward** positive behaviors.
- **Break** the pattern of negative behaviors early. Divert attention to a new activity or toy.
- Anticipate hunger, dirty diapers, and boredom. A whining child at 4 p.m. may signal hunger or one who wants your attention.
- **Help** your child explore the environment and learn how the body works.
- **Provide** toys that help your child to successfully practice developing skills.
- **Encourage** your child's personal independence. Help him or her practice dressing and undressing, combing his or her hair, brushing teeth, and using a fork or spoon.
- **Involve** your child in sharing family tasks. Let him or her practice setting the table, put away groceries, rake the lawn, run the vacuum, sweep, and dust.
- Learn from friends, family, and health professionals. Talk with your child's pediatrician. Look for parenting classes available in your community through schools, clinics, organizations, and health agencies.

Need more information?

Occupational therapists have expertise in a child's growth and development, such as appropriate physical and mental milestones, emotional, neurological, and muscular development, and behavior management. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist, practitioners are available through most hospitals, community clinics, and medical centers.

Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children with a broad range of physical, developmental, and psychological conditions. Practitioners also help clients and their caregivers with strategies that can prevent injury and secondary complications, and support health and well-being. Contact your local health organizations for more information.

