



How to **Connect** with Your Young Child Through Play

Playing is one of the easiest ways to build an emotional, loving bond with your young child. You not only connect on an emotional level, but you are showing unconditional love, concern, and respect for your child. And since young children don't yet have the ability to describe how they feel in words, we have to become good at reading their actions.

- **Allow your child to be creative when they play.** Give them the power to decide what and how they want to play. Remember, their imagination can tell you a lot about how they're feeling, even when they can't verbally express themselves.
- **Create a safe environment for your child.** This allows them to feel comfortable when expressing their thoughts and feelings. Remember, your child is expressing how they feel through their actions, so helping them feel heard is important.
- **Pay attention to your child's playful clues,** which will help you interpret what their play may symbolize. Don't over-analyze, but remember, just like adults sometimes want to "talk it out," children often want to "play it out". Therefore, playing may be all they need to blow off steam! Your child doesn't have the ability to say "I feel frustrated!" so their only option is to SHOW you they feel frustrated.
- **Be comfortable allowing your child to express his feelings.** As the song goes, "*Feelings...nothing more than, feelings...*" Feelings are normal, and the only way your child will understand THEY are normal, along with their feelings, is when you allow them to express how they feel. Remember, their expression isn't the same as our adult expression. When they kick and scream, your child is trying to tell you something. At this young age, your child doesn't have the mental capacity to be manipulative and conniving, so it's our job to help our children put words to their emotions. For example, "Wow, that's good stomping! You are stomping so hard... You are frustrated!"
- **Always be patient with your child.** Children are great at picking up on both spoken and unspoken rules and feelings. If your child senses your lack of patience, disinterest, lack of attention, and anger they are more likely to not open up to you about how they are feeling. *There's nothing worse than a closed-down teenager, and the best way to stop that is to not have a closed-down child!*

Through these techniques, children learn to identify and express feelings appropriately. How to put words to feelings like anger, frustration, embarrassment, and sadness will only help your child develop appropriate behaviors when they need to express how they feel. Playing with your child also will help YOU relax, as you let the stress of the day melt away and focus on the time together with your child.