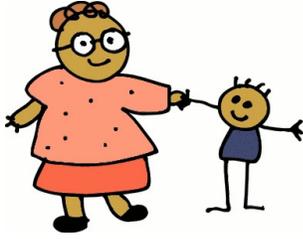


Games that Foster Connection



Games that foster connection can take many forms (chasing, wrestling, pillowfights). Playing is a great tool for when your child is in a bad mood and nothing seems to make her happy. At times like this, she is probably craving a connection with a parent, and playing can help restore the good feelings between you and your child. You will know you are on the right track if there are lots of giggles! Many of the games described below are drawn from ideas presented in the book

Playful Parenting by Lawrence J. Cohen, Ph.D., a wonderful resource for parents.

For Young Children

100 Kisses

Announce to your child that you are going to give her 100 kisses. Chase her around, gather her up and give her 10 or 20 kisses, then let her wriggle away again. Keep doing this until you've actually reached 100. Don't be surprised if your child begs for more than 100 kisses! Children love this game, as it makes them feel loved and wanted.

Tug-of-Love

One parent playfully pulls the child to her, saying, "I get Andrew now!" while the other one tugs the child back saying, "No! It's my turn! I haven't had enough Andrew yet!" This should bring on lots of laughter, a sign that the child's need for attention and love is being filled.

Super Mommy (or Daddy)

This one was made up by my son, and is played with two parents and one child. The child chooses which parent will be "Mean Mommy/Daddy" and which will be "Super Mommy/Daddy." Mean Mommy grabs up the child and says, "Nobody can steal you from me! I have you!" The child calls out for Super Daddy, who then comes running in to steal the child away from Mean Mommy. The next phase involves Super Daddy holding the child (unless the child is too big!) and just barely scooting past Mean Mommy who unsuccessfully lunges and tries to get the child a bunch of times. Finally, Super Daddy and child are caught, and everyone falls to the floor in a big, loving hug with lots of giggles. This game helps children work out their feelings when a parent is less than patient or has done something that the child considers "mean." (You will no doubt invent your own variation, but this is an idea that might get you going!)

Hide and Seek

Your child hides, and you "frantically" search for her, saying things like, "Where is Sophia? I must find Sophia! I can't live without her!" Search around (even if Sophia is in plain sight), until you discover her and gather her up for lots of kisses and cuddles. Try holding your child like baby and cooing over her the way you would a newborn.

T-Shirt Fight!

This is a good game for kids of all ages. Gather up some of your kid's T-shirts (or something else that's soft like several pairs of balled-up socks, stuffed animals, or a super squishy ball) and start throwing them at each other. Make a big show of falling over when you get hit, acting as goofy as you can in order to get lots of giggles. Children usually enjoy being tagged by you, too! Adjust how hard or easy you play based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

Games that Foster Connection

Follow the Leader

Do everything that your child wants to do, even if it is uncomfortable (crawling on your knees all over the house), unpleasant (pretending to eat worms), or nerve-wracking (making loud screaming noises). Your child wants to find out if you really will follow his lead! Of course, if something is truly unsafe you will need to make a suggestion about doing something else, but you'd be surprised how infrequently that will happen. This game can also be played with older children in a less literal way but asking them what they'd like to do and doing it with them (i.e. going to the mall, listening to their iPod, or watching a movie together).

Wrestling

Wrestle with your child, having her attempt to pin you down or end up on top of you. When wrestling, it's important to have a connection with your child through eye contact, cuddle breaks, hugging, smiling at each other, and giggling together. Let your child take the lead on how hard to wrestle, and what the goal of the wrestling is. Your wrestling style will develop naturally as you do this more with your child.

Pillow Fight

When pillow fighting, follow your child's lead, and hit only as hard as it takes to get a lot of giggles. Make a big show of it when you fall over after your child hits you, and adjust how hard or soft you hit based on your child's age, strength, and temperament.

No Giggling!

Make up a silly rule such as "no giggling," "no smiling," or "no blinking," and then make a big pretend fuss about it when they break the rule. This allows them to make light of an area in their lives that is very challenging (having to follow rules), and will actually help them to more easily follow the rules later. It's also fun and develops a sweet connection between parent and child.