

Magic Five Minutes

When parents spend individual time with their children they are giving them a precious gift. Furthermore, when parents spend individual focused time with their children they typically exhibit fewer behavior problems at home, including whining, defiance, and negative attention seeking behavior.

However, making time in the daily routine to give even 15 minutes of “quality attention” to children can be a difficult task for busy parents to accomplish between work and after school schedules. An alternative is to offer a ***Magic Five Minutes***. When parents are asked if they can offer five minutes of time during the week days, most enthusiastically respond with “Yes!”

Here are some guidelines for helping ***Magic Five Minutes (MFM)*** work its magic with your child.

- Call it ***Magic Five Minutes***. Naming this time does create an almost magical quality to children, especially young children. It provides a concrete way of telling children that you love them and that they are important to you.
- Schedule it as a part of the daily routine during the week and save the weekends for longer activities with your child. ***MFM*** seems to work best as part of the bedtime routine, before reading the final book of the evening and tucking your child in for the night.
- Don't make ***MFM*** contingent on behavior. It should neither be earned for positive/good behavior nor taken away for misbehavior. It should always be given freely.
- Activities during ***MFM*** can be tricky as you only have 5 minutes! Sometimes it is helpful to brainstorm a list of activities that can be conducted in 5 minutes, such as a back rub, a quick board game (or one that can be ongoing every night, a game of cards like *Old Maid*, or *Go Fish*, coloring one picture, or reading an extra book. Once the list is brainstormed you and your child can pick an activity. Avoid rough housing or electronic activities as they can over stimulate children and make it hard for them to settle down for the night.
- Another preferred activity for ***M5M*** is to do a “talk and listen” time. (This assumes that your child has typically developing language skills.) During this time your child gets to talk about anything he or she wishes and your job is to **LISTEN**. Avoid answering questions or answer briefly. Simply remind him that it is his time to talk. It is best to be an active or reflective listener and respond with statements such as “what do you think?” It may take a few days to adjust as your child learns that this really is a time when he can just chatter away and have your undivided attention.
- ***M5M*** does not allow your child to be rude or name call. He can talk about what he is mad about or what he thinks is unfair, *even if you think he is being unfair*.
- You may need to set a timer to let your child know when the 5 minutes has ended. Be sure to give a warning and have the next activity planned such as reading the nighttime story so that the transition goes smoothly. Remind them that they get ***M5M*** the next evening as well.

Once you have started this time together as a daily ritual, do your best to make it a predictable part of your daily routine. Don't be surprised if your child gets upset when you are unable to offer ***M5M***. It can become very important to your child and he will view it as a very special part of the day.

*Written and Compiled by Cathy Hedgepeth and Barbara Still, July 2012
Cathy C. Hedgepeth, MA, LPA, Triangle Parenting Support, Raleigh, NC
Barbara Still, PhD, Wee Play Psychological Services, Raleigh, NC*