

10-Minute Play Tracker

From Hulya Mehmet - Because tracking helps you see the invisible progress

A Note Before You Start

I've watched thousands of parents fill in play logs. Most write things like "nothing happened" or "same as yesterday."

Then I show them what actually happened: Their child played 2 minutes longer. Made eye contact once. Brought them a toy. Moved 10cm closer.

These tiny shifts? They're everything. This tracker helps you notice them.

Your Promise to Yourself (Not to Me)

- ☐ I will spend 10 minutes in present play each day
 - ☐ I will put my bloody phone in another room
 - ☐ I will follow their lead (even when it's boring)
 - ☐ I will notice without fixing
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Daily Play Log

Day 1: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low 12345 High
- My comfort level: Low 12345 High
- Connection felt: Low 12345 High

One thing that surprised me:

Day 2: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- My comfort level: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- Connection felt: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High

One moment of connection:

Day 3: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- My comfort level: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- Connection felt: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High

Something new that happened:

Day 4: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low 12345 High
- My comfort level: Low 12345 High
- Connection felt: Low 12345 High

How I felt afterward:

Day 5: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low 12345 High
- My comfort level: Low 12345 High
- Connection felt: Low 12345 High

A shift I'm noticing:

Day 6: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- My comfort level: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- Connection felt: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High

What's getting easier:

Day 7: _____ (date)

Time of day: _____

What my child chose to do:

Play type used: ☐ Parallel (alongside) ☐ Mirror (copying) ☐ Sensory (movement/touch)

What I noticed:

- My child's engagement: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- My comfort level: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High
- Connection felt: Low ☐1☐2☐3☐4☐5 High

This week's biggest win:

Week Reflection (The Honest Version)

Which play type felt least awful?

That's your starting point. Build from there.

When did your child seem most themselves?

Not "engaged" or "appropriate" - just themselves

What made YOU want to scream?

Name it. It's okay. I still hate repetitive play after 25 years.

What tiny magic moment happened?

There's always one. Even if it lasted 2 seconds.

How do you both feel after play now vs Day 1?

Different? Same? Both fine. Notice what you notice.

What would make next week 1% easier?

Not perfect. Just 1% easier. That's progress.

Celebrating Small Wins

Check any that happened this week:

- ☐ My child played near me longer than usual
- ☐ They made eye contact during play
- ☐ They brought me into their play somehow
- ☐ They seemed calmer during our play time
- ☐ They made new sounds or attempts at words
- ☐ They smiled or laughed during play
- ☐ They moved closer to me
- ☐ They let me copy their actions
- ☐ They checked to see if I was watching
- ☐ I felt more relaxed than usual
- ☐ I enjoyed the play (even a little!)
- ☐ I resisted the urge to teach
- ☐ I followed their lead the whole time
- ☐ I noticed something new about my child

Count your checks: _____ wins this week!

Sensory Play Ideas

Simple activities that build connection

Water Play (Calming Connection)

- **Pouring games:** Cups and water. Back and forth. Natural turn-taking
- **Washing dolls:** Gentle, nurturing, regulating
- **Bubble bath:** Add measuring cups. Pour over hands
- **Ice play:** Frozen toys in warm water. Temperature contrast
- **Spray bottles:** Plants, windows, each other (summer fun)

Movement Play (Energy Connection)

- **Pillow crashes:** Build. Knock down. Repeat
- **Dance party:** Their music. Copy their moves
- **Blanket rides:** Pull them around on smooth floors
- **Bear crawls:** Race on hands and knees
- **Yoga poses:** Animal poses together

Touch Play (Sensory Connection)

- **Playdough:** Squish, roll, poke. No end goal
- **Rice bins:** Hide toys. Search together
- **Finger painting:** On big paper, walls (washable), bodies
- **Texture hunt:** Soft things, rough things, smooth things

- **Massage games:** Gentle pressure on arms, back

Building Play (Problem-Solving Connection)

- **Cardboard boxes:** Endless possibilities
- **Couch cushions:** Forts, mountains, hideouts
- **Blocks:** Stack, knock down, stack again
- **Blanket tents:** Under tables, over chairs
- **Paper towel tubes:** Roll cars through

Quiet Play (Gentle Connection)

- **Flashlight games:** Shadows on walls
- **Sorting games:** By colour, size, texture
- **Books together:** Same book 20 times is fine
- **Puzzles:** Simple ones. Help when asked
- **Drawing:** Side by side. No instructions

Kitchen Play (Life Skills Connection)

- **Measuring:** Water, flour, anything
- **Stirring:** Big bowl, wooden spoon
- **Washing up:** Toys in sink with bubbles
- **Snack prep:** Tearing lettuce, spreading toast
- **Ice cream making:** Bag method with salt

Garden Play (Nature Connection)

- **Digging:** Small patch just for them
- **Watering:** Plants, mud, themselves
- **Bug hunting:** Look, don't necessarily touch
- **Leaf collecting:** Sort by size, colour
- **Sensory garden:** Plants to touch, smell

The Golden Rules for All Sensory Play

1. **Follow their lead** - If they want to just touch, just touch
2. **No pressure for "right" play** - There's no wrong way
3. **Stay present** - Your calm attention is the magic ingredient
4. **Let it be messy** - Mess means engagement
5. **End before meltdown** - Watch for overstimulation signs

When Sensory Play Goes Wrong

Too much stimulation signs:

- Getting wilder instead of calmer
- Can't stop when asked
- Eyes look "glazed"
- Seeking more intense input

What to do:

- Slow down immediately
- Lower your voice
- Add deep pressure (firm hug)
- Move to quieter activity
- Sometimes just stop

Making It Communication-Rich

Without being pushy:

- Use simple sound effects ("splash!" "wheee!")
- Offer simple choices (red cup or blue cup?)
- Create anticipation ("ready... set... go!")
- Notice and narrate simply ("wet hands!")
- Celebrate all attempts at communication

Remember: The goal isn't perfect play. It's connection. Trust that connection leads to communication.