Wouldn’t it be nice if instead of seeing frowns on your children’s faces and acting-out behaviors, you would see more smiles and cooperation? There is a way! With our very busy schedules, it’s often easy to overlook children’s good behaviors and qualities and be quick to point out to them all the things that they do wrong. Therefore, they get attention primarily for their negative behaviors. To a child, that kind of negative attention is better than no attention at all. So children begin to act-out in order to get attention from their parents. Then no one is happy. The way to break this negative cycle is to increase positive interactions with your children in order to decrease their need to act out to get your attention. “Special Time” is one way to do that.

There are several types of “special time” that parents could spend with their children, i.e.: family special time and one-on-one special time. Family special time is when parents and children all do something together, such as have a family dinner, play board games, etc. This article will focus on the one-on-one special time. Through one-on-one special time interactions with one’s children, parents would begin to set a foundation for a strong relationship and bond between themselves and their kids.

One-on-one special time involves several aspects. It needs to be one-on-one, meaning one parent and one child. It needs to be prearranged, which means that parents need to set a date with their child, just like we do for most other things in our lives. Write it on a calendar, for example, so both of you are aware of the plans. Ideally, about 15 minutes a day per child is recommended; however, more than what you already do now is best. It’s important that the activity that you and your child do is something that the child wants and likes to do. During this one-on-one time there should be no distractions such as television, telephone, other kids interrupting, etc. Do not discuss any problems or concerns during this time, but focus only on positive things about your child. It’s best to do something that’s interactive, such as playing a game, going to the park, playing sports, arts and crafts, cooking, reading or telling stories, having ice cream, etc. (Anything that the child enjoys which involves interacting together.) Watching television, playing video games, or driving, are not good one-on-one special time activities because there is minimal interaction occurring and these objects are distractions. Special time doesn’t have to cost any money; however, some kids, particularly adolescents,
may want to spend money as part of their one-on-one special time with their parent, such as going shopping. If that is acceptable for the parent, that’s fine, but it’s important to set a limit in advance of how much money is okay to spend, so that an argument doesn’t occur later.

Children really begin to look forward to their individual time with their parent. It provides them with the assurance that their parents are available to them and only them; in a consistent and positive way. This will make them feel happy and secure. Then they won’t need to act-out to get some attention because they know exactly when it’s just their special time. Once the acting-out behaviors decrease, you will be happier as well. In addition, special time with one’s child helps develop a strong and trusting relationship between you and your child. They will feel that they can come to you for help when they need it because you’ve been available to them in a consistent and positive way. After all, isn’t that the kind of relationship that all parents hope to have with their children?

Marina Bochkur-Dratver, Psy.D. is a clinical psychologist. She is the Intern Training Program Manager and a trained Parenting Class Facilitator at the Child and Family Center. Child & Family Center provides programs for children suffering from behavioral or emotional problems. Contact the Center at 259-9439