

Non-Directive Ecoplay Dos and Don'ts

While the first four sessions of Ecoplay are directive, with specific activities for parent and child to do together, the next four sessions are non-directive sessions in which the child leads the play.

By allowing the child to lead, the parent allows the child freedom of choice and exploration that helps to develop self-confidence and self-esteem in a natural environment. By having the opportunity to practice choice-making, and by linking that choice-making to specific consequences, you give your child the confidence necessary to consistently make good choices in the future.

Here are some dos and don'ts to keep in mind when engaging in non-directive Ecoplay with your child. As you engage in non-directive Ecoplay sessions, you may find it helpful to check off the items as a way of self-monitoring your growing Ecoplay skills. A word of caution; don't check off the list during your Ecoplay sessions. Wait until afterwards. During your Ecoplay sessions all of your attention should be directed towards your child.

Do...

- Do allow the child to lead the play
- Do encourage mindful skills
- Do praise the child's efforts
- Do be patient and mindful
- Do offer unconditional love and approval even when your child makes negative choices
- Do reinforce positive behaviors through rewards
- Do match your voice and affect to your child's voice and affect (exception: no yelling, even if child yells)
- Do solicit your child's input on how to solve problems
- Do teach your children to make themselves happy
- Do validate your child's feelings, whatever they are (remember, the feeling itself is okay; it's the behavior that comes after the feeling that may be less than helpful)
- Do what you say you're going to do
- Do walk slowly and deliberately enough for your child to keep up
- Do answer questions about flora and fauna, but only if you know what you're talking about

Don't...

- Don't ask questions, offer information, or make suggestions
- Don't make judgments on whether the play is good or bad, right or wrong
- Don't reprimand or scold (HUG limit-setting places no evaluations on behaviors; it simply sets limits)
- Don't praise the child
- Don't hover over the child (no helicopter parenting)
- Don't show affection, love or approval only for positive choices
- Don't withhold affection, love or approval for negative choices
- Don't punish or threaten to punish
- Don't yell If limit-setting is needed, use HUG (non-judgmental, non-punitive limit-setting)
- Don't solve your child's problems for them by telling them what to do and how to do it
- Don't deny your child's feelings, even negative ones; instead encourage them to express even negative feelings in positive, solution-focused ways
- Don't try to micromanage your child's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings
- Don't make promises you can't keep; when you do you teach your child that you are unreliable
- Don't do what you say you're not going to do
- Don't set the pace when walking outdoors; instead allow your child to lead
- Don't answer questions about what the child should be doing or how the child should be playing; instead, remind them, "That's up to you"
- Don't think that paying attention to your child will "spoil" them; research shows that just the opposite is true

Non-Directive Ecoplay Dos and Don'ts from concepts expressed in:

VanFleet, Risë, Sywulak, Andrea E. and Caparosa-Sniscak, Cynthia (2010). *Child-Centered Play Therapy*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

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