

Room Time

Room time is an extension of playpen time and blanket time for children in the preschool to early elementary age. As the child gets older, his need for more space to play will increase. When he is staying within the boundaries you establish for blanket time near you, you can test him to see if he is ready for the greater freedom of his room.

You begin this training stage by putting his blanket in his room with a few toys that mom decides on and instructing the child to play on the blanket for the time mom determines. Use a timer to identify the end of room time. You may need to instruct the child that he does not have the freedom to get off the blanket to get books or toys elsewhere in the room. If he throws or pushes the toys off the blanket, the logical consequence is that he has no toys to play with for the rest of the scheduled room time. If he chooses not to play, or decides to kick and scream, do not correct as long as he stays on the blanket. Your directive was to stay on the blanket. As long as he is staying on the blanket, leave him alone. If he will not stay on the blanket in his room after you have attempted training, then move back to blanket time near you and try again in 2-4 weeks.

Limit the toys to 3 or 4 items (i.e. tub of blocks, a puzzle, some little cars) so he won't become overwhelmed. With limited toys and more than 10-15 minutes to play, he will begin to search for creative ways to play with his toys. Even when you remove the boundary of the blanket later, do not give him unlimited access to all the toys on the shelf, in the closet or dresser during room time. Keeping this boundary will help prevent overwhelming him when it is time to pick up at the end of room time. As the child gets older and is content with the toys you pick out, you can occasionally get his input in choosing the toys



Keep the door open during room time so you can walk by and check on him. While many children are content to play alone in their room, the question becomes, "Do they play there willingly when mom decides when and what they will play with?" Training in this time frame will gain greater fruit for your efforts in the long run.

Use a timer for room time. The child knows there is a definite ending time and will be less likely to ask you if room time is over yet. Secondly, you remember that they are playing quietly and will not leave them there too long. If this is completely new for your child, start with as few as 5 minutes and build up to 45-60 minutes. Remember to train when they are well rested and not hungry. Adjustment will come more quickly if you are consistent in doing this daily and at near the same time each day.

Having room time when dad is home on the weekends is a good idea. Room time may be shorter or at a different time of day if that works better. Remember context. The main thing is that the parent decides without focusing on the child's emotions.

When room time is over, train the child to pick up his toys and put them away. This is a great way to train them in responsibility, gratefulness and orderliness. Do not start the next activity until this is done. If the child is young, you may need to help him in the beginning. Do not let him leave the room until this is done. For most children, mom needs to direct him to pick up one group of things at a time (i.e. cars) and then identify the next category. With time and consistency on your part, he will learn the expectation without constant direction.

Allow for this transition time in your routine. Room time trains the child to be able to play alone rather than having to be entertained or constantly with others. This is a common problem for first born children when mom has more time to play and fewer responsibilities. The child learns to focus and concentrate on one activity at a time for a longer duration. He learns to be content, peaceful, patient, self-controlled, and orderly. If you have a child who is only happy when others are in the room, try playing music, stories, or Scripture during their room time. If you have more than one child, put the children in different rooms for room time at the same time.

Once trained, you can use this time for your chores and responsibilities that take more concentration. This can be your motivation to stay present and consistent during the training time. I determined a set rotation of room time toys Monday through Friday to make the transition a quick one. If you have older preschoolers, I recommend keeping this 'room time' different than the time they spend on their beds looking at books during the transition period when they are switching to no more naps.

Room time toy suggestions:

Wooden train sets

Puzzles they can do on their own

Books and story tapes

Cars and trucks

Dolls, dollhouses and accessories

Duplos and Lego blocks

Little people play sets

