

## Caregiver Guide: Special Time\* with Teens

It is important for caregivers to share **regular, special time** with their teens/adolescents, as not only does this strengthen the relationship but it also helps them better navigate difficult situations like high stress, disagreements, or behavioral issues. Regularly having shared experiences can also help grow the parent-child bond, increase the teen's motivation for change, as well as improve shared, positive coping skills.

- **Schedule the special time regularly** (ideally daily or weekly) **and protect that time on the calendar** - The special time can be as short as 15 minutes, but adapt to what works for you. Just be sure to protect the time by scheduling it on days/times that are sustainable for both parent and child, and avoid possible distractions.
- **The teen should take the lead in choosing an activity, and it should be something that both the parent & teen can enjoy.** The activity doesn't need to cost money and shouldn't be related to chores, or similar life responsibilities.
- **Tailor the special time activity to your child's unique skills, abilities, and interests.** Below are some examples of activities that you could try. Interaction is key here; avoid passive entertainment options (like watching TV, being on devices).

<b>Parallel Activities to Consider during Special Time</b> (especially for neurodiverse teens)	<b>Face to Face Activities to Consider during Special Time</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Go for a walk, run, or hike</li><li>• Attend a community event</li><li>• Plant/tend to a garden</li><li>• Drive around the area listening to a playlist you both love</li><li>• Engage in your own individual activities in the same space, but while you talk about your day</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do a craft/make art</li><li>• Take a class together - online or in person</li><li>• Read the same book or comic, &amp; discuss it</li><li>• Have the teen teach their caregiver a new skill/about a subject they're interested in</li><li>• Volunteer for a cause you both care about</li></ul>

- **Lastly, remember: if one week the caregiver and/or child are just not able to share their usual special time, it's okay to reschedule** - It's okay if someone is too sick, or stressed, to have that week's special time! Just be sure to reschedule & regain momentum as soon as you are both ready.

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**Disclaimer:** If "special time" isn't language that fits you or your family, you can call it "dedicated quality time" or something similar. What is the most important is that you reserve and share that dedicated time between you and your child on a regular basis.

Adapted From: Seattle Children's PALS "Special Time" handout.