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his desire for affection from his mom. So here I was trying to hold the emotions of mom and child; both so desperately needing each other but struggling to make the connection.

Ms. Moore would share how frustrated she was with Sonny. She wanted him to be more of a big brother to his siblings while helping her out as well. Sonny never expressed having a problem helping his mom around the house but he at times just wanted to do kid stuff such as try out for the neighborhood football team, something Ms. Moore was against. She felt that if Sonny was going to continue to act up in school, she wouldn't allow him to play a sport. She didn't realize that engaging in an extracurricular activity could help shape his behavior in school positively as well as develop his relationships with other kids.

As part of our therapy, I wondered with Ms. Moore about how critical she was of Sonny and how this criticism may be affecting him. Without judgement, I reflected those behaviors to her and noted how Sonny may be responding. Ms. Moore was willing to listen to my observations and implement some ideas we came up with to allow Sonny to be a child just as his siblings were allowed to be children.

As I continued to work with Sonny and his mom, I noticed that he went from not talking about his family (or, talking about them negatively) to sharing with me all the great things they were beginning to do together. Sonny had rarely if ever talked

Finding the "Sonny" Side: A JPA Therapist's Case Story

I had the pleasure of working with the Moore family for two years by providing individual services to Sonny, one of Ms. Moore's children. Sonny was initially referred to me for counseling services because he was being bullied by classmates due to his poor hygiene.

When I initially started working with him, Ms. Moore was very critical of Sonny's behavior both at home and at school. Ms. Moore would often scold Sonny in front of me, making Sonny feel ashamed and embarrassed. At times, Ms. Moore would also seek me out to discuss personal issues which didn't always involve Sonny. And in session, I noticed that Sonny was seeking love and affection from me while often speaking about

about his younger brother but soon began making arts and crafts for him in session. I noticed that Sonny was no longer seeking affection from me but would embrace his mom whenever she picked him up early from session. Sonny would be a little agitated with his mom whenever our sessions ended early but it was followed by a hug and kiss to his mom which I always felt was so sweet.

As time went on, Sonny's personal hygiene

improved; he now felt better about himself as he gained his mother's support and affection. I attributed the positive changes I was seeing in both the mom and the child to Ms. Moore's willingness to invest in her son.

I recently saw Ms. Moore in passing and she was eager to share with me that Sonny's football team won their championship game and were on their way to the semi-finals! Sounds like a win-win for Sonny and his family! [JPA](#)



1. Invest, Invest, Invest! While most parents are willing to invest heavily in their children financially and academically, they often fail to invest in their social and emotional needs. Children need to know they'll be heard by their parents if no one else hears them. As parents, we should be our children's first point of contact when they're feeling hurt, wronged, or when they simply need comfort after a long day at school.
2. Allow your child to be just that: a child. "Parentified" children — those who are expected to fill adult roles even though they're not adults — often see themselves as equals to their parents when parents place them in that role. This can be confusing for children as they may be given the responsibility to care for younger siblings while their parents have to work or "live their lives"; yet, they're still expected to "stay in a child's place" when at school or in other environments. Believe or not, some children actually enjoy being their age when they're allowed to engage in age-appropriate activities with other peers their age.
3. Try to lead with praise; skip the criticism! Ms. Moore didn't realize how her negative comments affected Sonny until they were openly discussed. Yet when she recognized what she was doing and resolved to make changes, Sonny's positive reactions came quickly and happily.
4. Parents can be big kids too! Our children need to know and see their parents being kids at heart. It gives our children permission to explore and express their feelings when they see us do it. Get on the floor with your children; run around with them; be wild and crazy (without hurting yourself!) They'll continue to love and respect you when you keep healthy boundaries in place. Being playful with your children doesn't make them lose respect for you; it actually helps them gain respect for you. [JPA](#)