

What is Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)?

PCIT is an evidence-based treatment for young children with behavioral problems.

The decision to whether PCIT is the most appropriate treatment for you and your child is between you and your mental health professional.

PCIT is conducted through "coaching" sessions during which you and your child are in a playroom while the therapist is in an observation room watching you interact with your child through a one-way mirror and/or live video feed. You wear a "bug-in-the-ear" device through which the therapist provides in-the-moment coaching on skills you are learning to manage your child's behavior.



PCIT is done across two treatment phases. The first phase of treatment focuses on establishing warmth in your relationship with your child through learning and applying skills proven to help children feel calm, secure in their relationships with their parents, and good about themselves.



Increased attachment



Increased attention span



More positive interactions



Increased pro-social behaviors

Desired outcomes of the first phase of treatment in PCIT include:

- Decreased frequency, severity, and/or duration of tantrums
- Decreased activity levels
- Decreased negative attention-seeking behaviors (such as whining and bossiness)
- Decreased parental frustration
- Increased feelings of security, safety, and attachment to the primary caregiver
- Increased attention span
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased pro-social behaviors (such as sharing and taking turns)

The second phase of treatment will equip you to manage the most challenging of your child's behaviors while remaining confident, calm, and consistent in your approach to discipline. In this phase, you will learn proven strategies to help your child accept your limits, comply with your directions, respect house rules, and demonstrate appropriate behavior in public.

The second phase of treatment will equip you to manage the most challenging of your child's behaviors while remaining confident, calm, and consistent in your approach to discipline. In this phase, you will learn proven strategies to help your child accept your limits, comply with your directions, respect house rules, and demonstrate appropriate behavior in public.



Effective limit setting



Increased compliance

Desired outcomes of the second phase of treatment in PCIT include:

- Decreased frequency, severity, and/or duration of aggressive behavior
- Decreased frequency of destructive behavior (such as breaking toys on purpose)
- Decreased defiance
- Increased compliance with adult requests
- Increased respect for house rules
- Improved behavior in public
- Increased parental calmness and confidence during discipline

With consistent attendance and homework completion, PCIT can be completed within 12-20 sessions, though treatment is not time-limited. Treatment is considered complete when you have become proficient in both sets of skills and rate your child's behavior within normal limits on a behavior rating scale.

For more information, check out the PCIT website: <https://www.pcit.org/for-parents.html>

Other treatment and resource options for early childhood mental health

- Trauma-Focused CBT (TF-CBT), you can read more about it here: <https://www.nctsn.org/interventions/trauma-focused-cognitive-behavioral-therapy>
- Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) <https://childparentpsychotherapy.com/about/>
- Play Therapy (also commonly referred to as “Child-Centered Play Therapy”) <https://www.a4pt.org/page/WhyPlayTherapy>
- ZERO TO THREE <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/for-families/>