



How to Teach Your Child to Appropriately Get Your Attention

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It is difficult to have a conversation with someone if you do not have their attention—this is true for both children and adults. The ability to successfully capture someone’s attention is a fundamental social skill and provides the foundation for future success in social settings and relationships.



Children use a variety of ways to get attention and will often resort to techniques they find most effective, such as yelling or whining. For example, think about a child who wants to get Mom’s attention when she is on the phone. He knows that if he continues to yell loudly, Mom will eventually pause her phone conversation and ask what is needed. If yelling and whining gets a child what he needs, he will continue to yell and whine until he learns a new way to get attention.

How can you change this pattern? You can teach your child the way that you want him to get your attention (such as tapping you on the shoulder) and then reward him when that behavior occurs. When you take the time at home to build on the skills your child is learning at school, you reinforce these positive skills and create a solid social foundation for your child which will help to reduce challenging behaviors.

Backpack Connection Series

About this Series

The *Backpack Connection Series* was created by TACSEI to provide a way for teachers and parents/caregivers to work together to help young children develop social emotional skills and reduce challenging behavior. Teachers may choose to send a handout home in each child’s backpack when a new strategy or skill is introduced to the class. Each *Backpack Connection* handout provides information that helps parents stay informed about what their child is learning at school and specific ideas on how to use the strategy or skill at home.

The Pyramid Model



The Pyramid Model is a framework that provides programs with guidance on how to promote social emotional competence in all children and design effective interventions that support young children who might have persistent challenging behavior. It also provides practices to ensure that children with social emotional delays receive intentional teaching. Programs that implement the Pyramid Model are eager to work together with families to meet every child’s individualized learning and support needs. To learn more about the Pyramid Model, please visit challengingbehavior.org.

More Information

For more information about this topic, visit TACSEI’s website at challengingbehavior.org and type “get attention” in the Search Box in the upper-right corner of the screen.



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Try This at Home

- Model the behavior you are teaching and do it often! If you need your child’s attention, tap her on the shoulder, move to her eye level and begin your communication from there!
- Practice, practice, practice! Play with this new skill. Practice with both parents, siblings and friends. Your child can teach her grandparent or teddy bear how to tap on someone’s shoulder to get their attention.
- Remind your child of your expectation. If you are on the computer and she whines or begins to cry for attention, remind her, “It looks like you need something. I will respond if you tap on my shoulder and ask me.”
- Celebrate when your child displays this new skill. “Wow, you tapped me on the shoulder because you wanted some milk. I am super happy to get you some. What a great way to get my attention!”



Practice at School

Most peer interactions are initiated when a child wants to give or get something from a friend. Rather than grab or yell across the room, your child is learning to gain a friend’s attention before beginning a conversation by:

1. Moving to stand next to the person
2. Tapping the person on the shoulder
3. Looking at the person’s eyes to see if they have their attention



The Bottom Line

Behavior is meaningful and communicates a message. If a child does not have an appropriate way to communicate, he will often use challenging behavior (e.g., hitting, screaming, whining) to communicate his needs. If his needs are then met, the behavior is reinforced and he will continue to use the challenging behavior to communicate. When parents teach their child how to appropriately get attention, the child will be less likely use the challenging behavior to communicate.



www.challengingbehavior.org

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