

ATTENTION SEEKING

Quotes

Some students misbehave because they are trying to attract teacher attention. Surprisingly, many students who value adult attention don't really care if it is positive or negative attention – they just want attention.

– Jim Wright, School Psychologist and Special Education Administrator, New York

The attention seeking child is in need of more attention than most. They seem to have something to prove and don't take as much pride intrinsically as they do extrinsically. The child may not have a sense of belonging... the child may have low self-esteem and may need some confidence building. Sometimes the attention seeker is simply just immature.

– Sue Watson, Developmental Support Counselor

Notes

All children deserve a certain amount of positive attention. Most children receive it unconditionally while others have to resort to seeking out attention, usually in negative ways. Some children seem to need only small amounts of attention while others can't seem to get enough. Many child-rearing experts believe that attention seekers feel inadequate, have low self-esteem, and lack a sense of belonging. Other attention seekers act out to divert attention away from their problems. For instance, a child may not be able to do his math worksheet so he looks for attention by trying to be the class clown. A child's temperament also is a factor. Shy children may appear content with little attention while a risk-taker seeks much approval from his peers. Also, children with certain disorders such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder have difficulty controlling their impulsive/acting-out behaviors that get the attention of parents and teachers.

Behavioral expert Dr. William Glasser has conducted years of research and written several books about human's basic needs. He believes that all people spend a great deal of time and energy attempting to get their basic needs met. Glasser's five basic needs include:

SURVIVAL: food, shelter, clothing, warmth

LOVE: belonging, friendships, caring, involvement

POWER: importance, recognition, skill, competence

FUN: pleasure, fun, learning, laughter

FREEDOM: choice, independence, liberty, autonomy

When working with attention seekers the best approach may be to think in terms of prevention rather than reacting to the child's negative behaviors. If we use Glasser's model we will strive to help children get their basic needs met so they won't have to resort to a lot of attention seeking behaviors.

Recommended Resources

- 200 Ways to Raise A Boy's Emotional Intelligence
- 200 Ways to Raise A Girl's Self-Esteem



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Strategies

1. Children need to be taught appropriate ways to get our attention. In school students learn to raise their hands. At home children need to speak politely when requesting time and attention.
2. Yes, sometimes the best way to deal with negative behaviors is to ignore. Shelly will eventually learn that dad doesn't respond to her when she is whining.
3. Make sure children are eating and sleeping well. Hungry and tired students don't learn much in school. These children tend to whine and complain a lot.
4. Every day find time to let each child know that they are loved and appreciated. Parents can do this with hugs and "I love you." Teachers can do it with handshakes, pats on the back, and a "Welcome to class."
5. Children need recognition. Let them know that you are aware of their responsible behaviors.
6. Discover their strengths, gifts and talents. If Jaquan is a good artist, hang some of his pictures in your office. If Alex wishes to be the class clown, allow him to tell a few jokes to the class on Friday afternoons. Let Nanci sing the National Anthem.
7. Help children master skills. Invite Carol to stay after school for tutoring in math. The more competent she feels, the less likely she'll resort to acting out behaviors.
8. Invite children to join clubs and play sports. Extra-curricular activities provide positive outlets for children to master skills and develop new relationships.
9. Teachers may have to get creative in their teaching styles. Attention seekers usually do not fare well in traditional classrooms. Teachers can make class exciting by doing more group activities, cooperative learning, field trips, independent projects, and hands-on projects. The more fun learning is the less need to seek out attention.
10. Give children choices. This gives them a sense of power and freedom. "Maurice, do you want to do an article on the Civil War or the Revolutionary War?" Parents can try, "Arnie, do you want to clear the table or wash dishes?"
11. Give children a chance to prove they can be trusted. A father may allow his son to use his tools without asking, as long as he puts them back. A teacher may tell Tameka, "Yes, you may go the media center by yourself. Be back in ten minutes."
12. Be selective in giving attention. Don't give a child attention when she is acting out. Instead, surprise her when she least expects it.
13. Parents are encouraged to find a few minutes every day to spend alone with each child in a positive way. This must be unconditional. Even if Claire had a bad attitude when she came home from school, she still gets one-on-one time with mom.
14. When planning special time with a child, let him/her select the activity.
15. Schedule surprise Celebration Days. If you notice improvements in the child's self-control and behavior, announce, "Mara, I've noticed you worked hard lately at not complaining. Close your book, put down your pencil, and let's walk to the cafeteria and get a snack."
16. Written contracts can be effective with older children. Together, you and the child, select a behavior to be improved. Build in a positive consequence and sign the contract.
17. Teachers can ask children questions about their non-school time. "How did your team do last night? How is your mother feeling? What book are you reading? What is your favorite television show?" This lets the child know that you are interested in more than just her academics.
18. Teachers can write positive remarks on students' papers. Parents can write letters to their children that expresses their unconditional love. Put the letters in the mail or in their book bags.
19. Winks, "thumbs ups" and pats on the back can be more powerful than words to some children and adolescents.