

## What Is It?

When students use challenging behaviors as a way to *get attention*, they may need to be taught a requesting response, which is a socially acceptable way to request attention.

## When to Use It

- Requesting attention is taught as a replacement behavior for a student with a challenging behavior. Typically, a requesting response is included in a behavior support plan.
- For students where the function of behavior provides attention, you may teach the student to gain attention or social interaction more appropriately (e.g., raising his hand, socially appropriate comments/jokes, high fives, etc.)
- Requesting responses are used when students need to learn to gain access to peer attention or adult attention.
- A requesting response should also be combined with other interventions that reduce the occurrences of challenging behavior.
- This strategy requires the teacher to initially provide direct instruction and prompting. It should be implemented during activities where an adult can provide embedded instruction for learning the requesting response within the classroom activity.

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

	1. Identify the function of the challenging behavior. It should be access to attention to use this strategy.
	2. Select the method of communication that is most appropriate for the student to use (verbally requesting, pointing to a symbol, gesturing). This response should already be a part of the student's skill repertoire.
	3. Based on the student's behavior, identify the longest amount of time the student can engage in an activity before demonstrating a challenging behavior. This is known as the critical time period. Before reaching the end of the critical time period, provide the student the attention (prompt a peer if the student was seeking peer attention or provide adult attention). For example, if you are teaching the student to gain adult attention, at the critical point just before the problem behavior occurs, provide the student attention.
	4. Once the student associates the activity with reinforcement, prompt the student to request attention at the critical point before the problem behavior occurs. Teachers can model, provide explicit instruction, or use prompting strategies to teach the child to appropriately request attention.
	5. After the student correctly demonstrates the requesting response, immediately provide the student with the request (e.g., the teacher stops to talk to the student when the student appropriately requests attention).

	6. When the student is successful in demonstrating the appropriate communicative response over several opportunities, reduce the number of prompts that are needed to support the student in completing the requesting response.
	7. Once the student is successfully completing the correct response with minimal prompting and the challenging behaviors have stayed low, begin to delay access to the reinforcement.

## Example

*Ava is frequently out of her seat during independent work. The intervention team conducts a functional behavior assessment and determines that Ava leaves her seat and wanders around the classroom to gain the attention of the teacher, Ms. Francis. The team decides to use a requesting response strategy, among others, to teach Ava how to request attention from Ms. Francis. They decide that Ava should raise her hand and wait at her desk for Ms. Francis to approach her. They select this response because Ava is capable of performing both of these skills independently.*

*After collecting baseline data, the team determines that Ava can stay engaged in independent seatwork for 5 minutes before demonstrating the problem behavior. Before teaching Ava how to appropriately request attention, she must associate the task with the reinforcement. To teach this association, Ms. Francis approaches Ava's desk after 4 minutes and 30 seconds of independent seatwork and checks in with her. At this time, Ms. Francis provides Ava with direct attention. She asks Ava how she is doing with the work and encourages her to keep going. After several sessions where Ms. Francis provides Ava with attention after 4 minutes and 30 seconds of independent work, Ms. Francis begins to teach Ava how to appropriately request attention. Ms. Francis uses a prompting strategy to teach her. After 4 minutes and 30 seconds, Ms. Francis verbally prompts Ava and says, "If you need me, raise your hand and I'll be right over." Then Ms. Francis models a raised hand and physically prompts Ava to raise her hand by tapping her on her shoulder. When Ava raises her hand, Ms. Francis immediately provides her with attention.*

*Over the next few opportunities, Ms. Francis slowly fades her prompts. She starts by increasing her proximity to Ava and using a visual prompt (i.e., Ms. Francis raises her hand to cue Ava). When Ava raises her hand, Ms. Francis immediately reinforces Ava by saying, "Yes, Ava. How are you doing?" Eventually, as Ava becomes more independent and successful in using a requesting response, Ms. Francis fades out all prompts. While using this strategy, Ms. Francis does not reinforce when Ava gets out of her seat. If the problem behavior continues to occur while fading the prompts, Ms. Francis increases the level of prompting that is necessary to support Ava in using the appropriate communicative response to request attention.*

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- The function of the behavior must be known. The appropriate requesting strategy must be aligned with the function. That is, a student should be taught to take a break if the function is escape. Importantly, do not teach a child to take a break if the function of the challenging behavior is attention.
- If the student begins to use the requesting response before the critical point has ended (and there is no problem behavior), praise the student for the appropriate requesting response and then establish an additional requirement before the request is reinforced ("Great job asking raising your hand, please finish one more math problem and then we can talk about what you are doing after school.").

- When using this strategy, do not reinforce the challenging behavior. See the “Extinction Procedures” for additional information on eliminating reinforcement for challenging behaviors.
- If the challenging behavior occurs before the critical time period, ignore the problem behavior and do not give attention either with prompting or directly. If the behavior truly cannot be ignored (i.e., the student is significantly interfering with the learning of others or the behavior is dangerous), redirect the student to what he should be doing without mentioning the challenging behavior.
- Minimize the likelihood that the challenging behavior will occur prior to the acceptable communicative response. You can do this by ensuring that the selected activity is in the student’s skill repertoire and that the student typically engages in the activity appropriately for the entire duration of the critical time period.
- Teach this strategy in combination with antecedent interventions that prevent problem behavior from occurring.
- Be sure to provide reinforcement for the new behavior consistently as the student first begins to learn the skill.

## Resources

Carr, E. G. & Durand, M. V. (1985). Reducing behavior problems through functional communication training. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 18, 11-126.