

## What Is It?

Sometimes children use challenging behavior as a way in which to gain the attention of others. Teaching young children other ways to appropriately request attention can be an important individualized strategy for increasing socially acceptable behavior and decreasing challenging behavior.

## When to Use It

Teaching a request for attention is useful almost anytime. Specifically, teach requesting attention:

- When a child engages in challenging behavior that is maintained by attention.
- As a “replacement behavior” within a behavior support plan for a child to use in situations that typically result in challenging behavior.
- During naturally occurring routines (e.g., snack time, circle time, free play, outdoor time).

## Steps to Implementation / How to Do It

<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Identify what is maintaining the challenging behavior. This strategy is most effective when the function is to gain attention.
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Decide how you will teach the child to request attention (e.g., verbally, pointing to a symbol, sign language, gestures, an AAC device). This response should be something the child already knows how to do and is relatively easy for the child.
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Remind the child and model how they can appropriately gain attention before activities in which they are likely to engage in challenging behavior to access attention.
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Observe the child carefully during activities and routines. Prompt the child to ask for attention before the challenging behavior occurs. This can happen in one of two ways:  -If the child tends to seek attention after a certain period of time, observe for the longest period of time the child engages in the ongoing activity before a challenging behavior occurs. This is known as the critical time period. Prompt the child to request attention before reaching the end of the critical time period. Adults can model, provide explicit instruction, or use prompting strategies to teach the child to appropriately request attention.  -If there are no patterns in how long the child engages in an ongoing activity prior to engaging in challenging behavior, look for earlier signs that may indicate attention seeking (e.g., expression changes, looking around, making noises). When you see beginning signs, remind the child how they can gain attention from others.

## Teaching a Request for Attention

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>5. Honor the child's requests for attention. After the child asks for attention, immediately attend to and interact with the child (e.g., the adult stops to talk and play with the child when they appropriately request attention).</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>6. When the child is successful in requesting attention over several opportunities, reduce the number of prompts or reminders you provide to indicate that attention is available.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>7. Once the child is successfully asking for attention with minimal prompting and the challenging behavior has stayed low, begin to delay access to the reinforcer (i.e., attention) during times in which it is less natural to directly interact with the child.</p>

### Example

*Ava is frequently pushing her peers during free play. The intervention team conducts a functional behavior assessment and determines that Ava pushes her peers when adult attention is directed elsewhere as a way in which to gain attention from the preschool teacher, Ms. Francis. The team decides to teach Ava how to appropriately request Ms. Francis' attention. They decide that Ava should approach Ms. Francis and tap her arm. They select this response because Ava is capable of performing both of these skills independently, and has actively sought out Ms. Francis in the past.*

*The team collects baseline data and determines that Ava tends to participate in outdoor play without direct adult attention for about 5 minutes before engaging in the challenging behavior. Before teaching Ava how to appropriately request attention, Ms. Francis knows that Ava must associate this task (requesting attention) with the reinforcement (Ms. Francis' attention). To teach this association, Ms. Francis approaches Ava during outdoor play after 4 minutes and 30 seconds to check in and engage with her. At this time, Ms. Francis provides Ava with direct attention. She asks Ava what she is doing and briefly joins in her play. After several sessions where Ms. Francis provides Ava with attention after 4 minutes and 30 seconds of outdoor play, 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, I'll be over here and you can come get me by tapping me on the arm." Then Ms. Francis models tapping her own arm and assists Ava in tapping her on the arm as well. When Ava approaches her at outdoor time and taps her on the arm, Ms. Francis immediately provides her with attention and engages with Ava.*

*Over the next few opportunities, Ms. Francis slowly fades her prompts. She starts by increasing her proximity to Ava and using a visual prompt (e.g., Ms. Francis taps her own arm to cue Ava). When Ava taps her on the arm, Ms. Francis immediately reinforces Ava by saying, "Hi, 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 minimizes direct attention to pushing behavior while redirecting Ava to appropriate play and ensuring peer safety.*

## How to Increase Effectiveness

- Look for opportunities to teach the skill of requesting attention. You can do this by selecting activities and routines during which the child engages appropriately for the greatest length of time.
- Teach this skill in combination with antecedent interventions that prevent challenging behavior from occurring.
- Reinforce the new behavior consistently as the child first begins to learn the skill.
- Help the child learn to use this skill appropriately across different settings, activities, and people.
- If the challenging behavior occurs before the critical time period, minimize attention provided to the challenging behavior while monitoring and ensuring child safety. If attention to the behavior is necessary (e.g., the child is significantly interfering with the participation of others or the behavior is dangerous), redirect the child to an appropriate activity without commenting on (i.e., providing attention to) the challenging behavior.

## Resources

Dunlap, G., & Duda, M. (2004). [Using functional communication training to replace challenging behavior.](#)

Franzone, E. (2009). [Steps for implementation: Functional communication training.](#)