

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 2: getting attention

In this lesson we examined how to get attention by using quality behaviours because children with poor social thinking are inclined to misread and miss time social interactions. They struggle to discriminate between seeking attention using quality behaviours and grabbing it in ways that are experienced by others as off-putting. As children are lead to experiment with varying styles of getting attention, the scope for more satisfying communication begins.

Here are a few ideas you may wish to draw on to support the way in which your child goes about gaining attention from others;



Keep the big picture in mind

Sometimes when parents have long been absorbed in their child's tricky attention seeking behaviours, their optimism and patience become frayed. It is natural for parents to hit low spots or feel disheartened at times. What is effective is to keep the big picture in mind; progress is slower for some and it is the simple, day to day things we consistently say and do that makes the greatest difference for our children.

The power to turn others 'on' and 'off'

Promote the idea that we cannot control the behaviour of others, but we can manage our actions and responses. Assist your child to understand that as they learn to seek attention by using friendly approaches others (adults and children) will be influenced to like them.

People watching

A wonderful idea is to head off on an observational trip to watch people. First decide on the place to visit. As an example, you might head to a busy café with your child. Order a milkshake for them and a coffee for yourself and sit together at a table located near the counter. Take out a small sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. Write 'friendly behaviours' (great attention seeking skills) on one side and 'unhelpful behaviours' (demanding attention seeking) on the other. Keep a tally of people's personal style as they speak with the shop assistants. Record a word or a phrase in the appropriate column that describes what each person did to be friendly or otherwise. Study how they present themselves; the words they use, voice tone, patience, eye contact, body language, whether or not they smiled and how they gained attention if they had to wait. Watching people is enlightening! It provides direct modelling and the basis for a very productive discussion.

"How did they make you feel?"

After you have met a friendly or unfriendly person, and your child has been with you, ask them how they felt in that person's company. Share with them how you felt. Ask whether the person's approach made them feel as though they wanted to help them?

Catch the good behaviours

Many children who seek attention in negative ways do so because they believe it works for them. It's become their habit! They are reliant on perceptive adults to cue them towards more pro-social approaches. Be persistent and continue to talk about the best behaviours to gain quality attention.

The golden rule is to catch positive behaviours and comment on them. This is the best way to develop the behaviours we want. To do this one family decided to use raffle tickets to keep demanding attention seeking behaviours in check. They supplied their children with ten raffle tickets each at the beginning of a Saturday or Sunday. The idea was that each time one of their children blurted out demanding attention seeking requests such as; "I want ...", "I need ...", "Can I have ...", "Can we go ...", "Can you do...", "Where is ...", "You should ...", "Why can't I ...", "When will ...", they had to hand over a raffle ticket before rephrasing their question in a friendly way. Those who had seven raffle tickets or more remaining by the end of the afternoon traded them in for a prearranged treat! It's not foolproof, but it took each of the children closer to appreciating how to seek attention with greater skill. Never forget that a little bit of clever tactical ignoring can go a long way too!

Go gently, gently

Remember that for children to experiment with new ideas, skills and behaviours they need to feel comfortable and relaxed within the family. Be gentle and consistent with your child when attempting to change old habits. So often a behaviour that appears as aloof, too highly spirited or unfriendly is more a measure of their awkward social thinking.



*"A friend is one of the nicest things you can have,
and one of the best things you can be."*

Douglas Pagels