**What to Do About an Attention-Seeking Child**

A child that wants attention will get it by some means.  This is usually done in a positive way.  They do a drawing or perform a play but by offering an adult the best of what they have to offer they seek and hopefully get some attention.  In general children who are well adjusted tend to need attention on a little and not very often basis.  As long as attention is given when needed, which is usually the case, things run smoothly.  However, some children seem to have an insatiable desire for attention.  They get positive attention galore yet they want more.  They misbehave and quickly realise that certain behaviors can't be ignored by adults and engage in them.  The class teacher will tell you they spend vast quantities of their time with the child yet it is never enough.  The child if observed in class will be engaging in a whole host of activities all of which appear geared toward getting attention.  It would be nothing noteworthy for children like this to have the teacher intervene with them every 2-3 minutes.

Often parents and teachers are confused.  They will tell the psychologist that the child gets lots of attention, much more than any other member of the class, something that is supported by observation.  The important thing to remember with humans, in such cases, is that we are never dealing with concrete realities.  What we are dealing with is perceptions.  If is rather convenient to see the child's thinking in terms of there being a black box through which all thinking must pass.  The black box contains one simple instruction that is, "I do not get enough attention" .   If we take on board this simple assumption we can now see why the child will behave in an attention seeking way for, instance after being taken out for a wonderful day out and absolutely showered with attention they come home and do something totally silly that guarantees more attention, albeit negative.

**Children who are attention-seeking have a legitimate need.** It’s our job to teach them how to get it in a legitimate way.

The first question to ask ourselves is whether the child has a point. Is he showing us by his behavior that we’re not involved enough? It’s easy to get so caught up with work, chores, activities, and responsibilities that we don’t spend enough time specifically interacting with our children. A shocking statistic is that the average American child only gets 3.5 minutes a day of uninterrupted individual attention from her parents! When that’s the case, the child doesn’t need discipline so much as the parents need to reorder priorities.

When children are getting plenty of parental juice but are still misbehaving, they have somehow misunderstood what they need to do to engage others. Then some remedial work needs to be done. It comes down to these not-so-easy steps:

**1. Catch them being good.** Give attention for appropriate behavior. Look for opportunities to make a positive comment, to pat a child on the shoulder, to share an activity, and to have a conversation. Fill up the attention hole with good stuff as many times a day as you can. Surely we can all do better than that 3.5 minute daily average!

**2. Ignore the misbehavior but not the child.** When the child misbehaves, resist the temptation to lecture, nag, scold, yell, or punish. Negative reactions will only keep the negative interaction going. The less talking about the misbehavior, the better. Institute the consequence without drama and re-engage positively.

**3. Be consistent.** It’s the only way children know we mean what we say.

**4. Repeat.** Repeat until the child gets it. Repeat whenever misbehavior is more than a momentary lapse. Repeat more than you think should be necessary. Do it until it becomes a pattern of interaction in your family’s life.

It’s normal to need attention from others. In fact, it’s a fundamental human need. Kids who are secure in the knowledge that the adults in their lives are interested in them don’t need to act up — at least most of the time. (Everyone can have an off-day now and then.) By filling them up with love and attention and by consistently redirecting negative behaviors, we can help our children learn how to get and give the positive attention that is fundamental to healthy relationships. Not surprisingly, when we parents are so positively connected to our children, we benefit too.

**Something to Try…..**

The following intervention is extraordinarily powerful.  It works just about every time and the only reason it fails is because the adult stops.  Children never tire of this intervention.  The intervention takes about ten minutes each day and is focused on the child's perceptual system.

Special Time.
Tell the child that they will be getting a special time each day.
Then each day tell them that special time will start in 2 minutes.
Tell the child that special time will start now.
Engage in special time.
Tell the child that special time will end in 2 minutes.
Tell the child that special time will end now.

You have therefore told the child four times that they are getting special time.

During special time the child may choose to do anything that is reasonable.  They may want to watch a video with you or make a cake (use a ready made mix) for instance.  Do not teach.  Simply watch the child, helping if they request it, never offer.  The adult watches the child and every so often sums up what the child is doing with praise for the skills shown.  For instance I love the way you cuddle me.  I love the way you are mixing that cake mix.  This shows that the adult is paying attention.  The analogy usually used is bathing the child in a warm bath of positive attention.

Do this every day.
Do not under any circumstances take away the special time as a sanction.
Even if the child has had an awful day, special time must occur.

<http://www.educational-psychologist.co.uk/sen-information/attention-seeking-behavior/>

http://psychcentral.com/lib/2011/what-to-do-about-attention-seeking-kids/