



Hindlip First School
Tibberton First School



Attention Needing

This guidance has been written by our partners at
Perryfields Primary PRU.



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Attention Needing

Children can seek attention at school for various reasons including:

- They have a lack of attention in other areas of their life.
- Getting attention makes them feel important or valued. (This is often the case in children with low self-esteem or a lack of confidence.)
- They are attention addicts as a result of receiving large amounts of attention by their parent/carer during their early development.

Most children will have at times encountered the following:

- Negative attention
- Positive attention
- No attention

Children in their early years quickly develop the skills needed to assess the type of attention they receive or are missing and how they can manipulate this in order to have their needs met. This continues into teenage years and many adults will also continue to exhibit attention seeking behaviours.

For many children any attention is welcome however they will often exhibit behaviours which provide them with negative attention as this usually elicits an immediate response and is an easier option than trying to obtain positive attention.

Behaviour which is presented to try and obtain negative attention is often classed as “low-level” but when it persists it can have a significant impact on a class. The child will often endeavour to receive a consequence or be ridiculed in order to satisfy their attention need.



Such behaviours can include:

- **Being silly**
- **Disrupting others**
- **Interrupting when others are speaking**
- **Tantrums / whining**
- **Wild / outlandish behaviour**
- **Over-reacting to events**
- **Becoming the victim in disputes**
- **Refusing to attempt work or doing it with a lack of effort**
- **Intentionally making mistakes**
- **Lying or over-dramatizing events**
- **Constant toileting requests**
- **Intentional disorganisation – claiming property is lost**
- **Gloating peers to get a reaction/negative response**
- **Instigating arguments**
- **Ignoring instructions/requests**

The most important thing when trying to support a child with a need for attention is to try and establish what the underlying reason is for this. Think about the emotional connection the child needs to have and how your relationship can support this.



Consider the following:

- Does the child have a relationship at home which provides positive and regular attention?
- Does the child have low self-esteem and need constant reassurance?
- Have circumstances at home impacted on the attention the child was receiving for example a new sibling, parental separation, illness or bereavement?
- Does the child have less attention than a sibling who has special needs?
- Does their parent/carer have poor mental health meaning they need rather than give attention?

Whilst continuous attention needing behaviours can become very frustrating it is vital that a positive relationship with the child is upheld. It is far more likely that a child will change their behaviours for an adult they have a trusted relationship with. Remember the child is behaving in an attention needing way to fulfil a need.

The most effective way to address attention needing inappropriate behaviour is to ignore it if safe to do so. Encourage the child to behave in a way which will reward them with attention but in a positive way.

- ✓ **Utilise tactical ignoring** – chose what you feel able and safe to ignore and do so. If particular behaviours are ignored the child will need to consider other ways to obtain the attention they need.
- ✓ **Don't highlight these behaviours to their peers**, by doing this they are not only getting your attention but the attention of the whole class.
- ✓ **If you have to discuss behaviour concerns do this privately and ensure you use positive language.** For example rather than saying, *"You need to stop swinging on your chair."* try *"I would really like it if you sat*

nicely in your chair.” Ensure when they then do this you give them praise as they will then see this as positive attention.

- ✓ **Use proximity praise.** When others around them are making good choices highlight this. This will help to reinforce that attention won't be given for inappropriate choices but instead for good choices.
- ✓ **Use specific proximity praise to named children adjacent to the attention seeking child.** For example, *“This table is trying really hard to solve the puzzle and I can see that Mary and Peter have really persevered with it, well done you two.”* Again this encourages the attention seeking child to try and obtain positive praise.

Consider ways to give random praise which is unexpected. This helps to meet the child's need for continuous attention and works well as they are receiving it without having to engineer ways to get it. You could:

- ✓ Make eye contact and smile.
- ✓ Pat them on the shoulder as you walk past.
- ✓ Check in with them to see how they doing.
- ✓ Ask the child to assist with something in class.
- ✓ Leave a note on their desk with positive praise or write something positive in their book.
- ✓ Let them answer a question on the carpet.
- ✓ Ask their opinion about something.
- ✓ Praise them by name, *“Mary that handwriting is beautiful.”*
- ✓ Ask them to help another child who is struggling.
- ✓ Leave an object with them and ask them to look after. Check in to make sure they still have it.



- ✓ Notice different things about them *“Look how smart your hair looks I can see you have had it cut over the weekend.”*

As their behaviours settle due to their attention need being met this random praise can be gradually reduced and but then increased again at later points if needed.

- ✓ Use positive praise cards for all the children. These can be given without warning to promote good behaviours. It is likely that children who need attention will want to receive one of these and when they see others doing so will try and behave in a way which would warrant one being given.



Although often children will behave inappropriately to obtain attention they can also be very charming and compliant in order achieve the attention they crave. Be mindful of this as a child who appears to be making all the right choices and going over and beyond to please can become controlling in an unconventional way. This is harder to spot than a child who seeks negative attention.

Signs to look out for can include:

- **Work completed at home and brought in for you on a regular basis.**
- **Pictures drawn for you with an expectation that they will be displayed.**
- **Daily offers to help in the classroom rather than going out to play.**
- **Pushing themselves to finish a task early so you can set an additional task for them.**
- **Being the perfect role model so they receive the proximity praise.**
- **Helping others to get recognition.**
- **Complimenting you.**
- **Bringing in gifts for you.**
- **Seeking you out when not in class with them.**

Individually these would not be a concern but if a child was regularly exhibiting several of these behaviours then consider how to reduce the amount of attention they were being given whilst still supporting their needs. Unfortunately if such behaviours are allowed to continue it could result in the child becoming obsessive resulting in attachment issues.

Attention Addicts are children who have received an unusually high amount of attention from a parent/ parents or carers since birth. As this would have been present throughout their early developmental stages they would deem high levels of attention as the norm. Reasons why children are given such a high level of attention could be:

- **Only child**
- **IVF baby**
- **Adopted child**
- **Loss of a sibling**



- **Loss of a parent**
- **Single parent**
- **Parents not receiving attention as a child**
- **The child having an illness or diagnosis**
- **Grandparents being care givers**
- **Children with a nanny/au pair**

Children who are Attention Addicts have an expectation that they should be entitled to receive high levels of attention. They are often used to having adults doing everything for them and as a result of this have no independence and lack resilience. In addition to this they can often form strong attachments to adults which can be problematic. Support needs to be given to these children in the following way:

- ✓ **Encourage independence and celebrate this when it is achieved.**
- ✓ **Develop their social awareness in order that they can understand that attention at school needs to be shared.**
- ✓ **Facilitate ways they can start to share with others – toys or games are a good starting point.**
- ✓ **Show them empathy if they dysregulate when they are not able to receive the level of attention they are used to. Explain the reasons why is this.**
- ✓ **Give them clear boundaries about how much attention can be given and when this will be.**
- ✓ **Work if possible with the parents / carers to try and gradually reduce the amount of attention given at home.**

Try to remain calm when there are constant demands on your attention by particular individuals. Accept that some children need more attention than others. Remember that children are not good at telling you why they need

attention. What they are experts in, however, is how they get it. Remember that a lot of attention needing behaviours are developmentally normal.

