

# Paying Attention to Your Child

Paying attention to your child means more than being physically present. Parents and Caregivers can show that they are paying attention by learning how to listen to children, how to talk with them, and how to respond to their actions.

## Benefits of Attention

Giving your child positive attention for good behavior can help boost self-esteem, improve your relationship, and help your child understand the behaviors that you like and want to see more often.

## This is Easier Said than Done!

Kids love attention, even if it's negative attention! Sometimes parents and caregivers accidentally give attention to misbehavior which teaches kids to continue the misbehavior and to do it more often.

## Active Listening

- When parents and caregivers actively listen to their child, they show that they care and are trying to understand how the child feels about what is happening. This also gives you the opportunity to help your child learn.
- **Reflection** is one way to show that you are actively listening. Reflect what your child says by repeating and rephrasing out loud what your child says.
  - For example, if your child says "I drew some sghetti!" you can say, "Yes, you drew some spaghetti!" This allows you to show that you are listening and that you care.
  - You can do reflections with feelings too. If you notice that your child is experiencing a feeling, you can show that you are paying attention and also help them identify the feeling. For example, if your child is crying or seems sad, you can say "I can see that you are upset. I am here to help."

## Tips for Giving Attention that Pays Off

- Explain to your child what behavior you expect ahead of time → Be clear, direct, and keep it simple
- Give attention for behaviors you like → Give lots of attention. Attention can be given by enthusiastically telling your child what you like about their behavior, giving a pat on the back, or a quiet whisper to let them know they are doing something well.
- Don't give attention for behaviors you don't like → Try something called "planned ignoring" by intentionally ignoring a specific behavior you want your child to stop such as whining, yelling, back talking, and cursing. Remember, the misbehavior will likely get worse before it gets better and your child may need help building new skills - stick with it! While waiting for the behavior to turn around, keep your eyes and ears open to catch your child doing something good.
- Pay attention to your child when they are talking to you or trying to communicate with you. Giving your child your full attention will help you understand what they are trying to tell you. It will also make them feel like you care about what they have to say. Remember, put your phone down, turn the TV off, take a break from your to-do list, make eye contact, and give your child your full attention!

## Paying Attention to Positive Opposites

If you notice a behavior you would like your child to stop, start by identifying the positive opposite skill. Then, try to intentionally put effort into helping your child develop the positive opposite skill by paying attention to it. You can actively do this by: 1) noticing and praising when your child does show the positive opposite, at least a little bit, 2) pointing the positive opposite out when you read books, 3) talking out loud when you are modeling the positive opposite for your child, and 4) prior to tricky situations, coaching your child on how to show the positive opposite. Check out to the chart below to see some examples of positive opposites.

Easily Frustrated	→	Patient
Worried	→	Brave
Lacking Persistence	→	Stick With It
Impulsive	→	Think it Through
Inflexible	→	Flexible

## Check Out This Video!

Paying Attention,  
So Attention Pays Off:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jzRkGuKr1I)

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References:

CDC: Parenting Essentials for Toddlers and Preschoolers  
Video provided by Central Oregon Pediatric Associates