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## How to Handle Attention Seeking Behavior

When children misbehave they are usually looking for attention. When they misbehave you will become annoyed and angry with them. You can change this, not by trying to make the child behave well, but by changing how you respond to the misbehaviour.

We give children what is known as negative attention when they misbehave and this is often better than no attention in the eyes of the child. If you watch your own behaviour towards your children you may be inclined to leave them alone when they are being quiet - and only really interact with them when they are misbehaving.

For example, if you don't have a strict bedtime routine, once you put the children to bed and sit down they could be right back downstairs looking for attention. You are tired and you want a little bit of space for yourself. All this carry on up and down the stairs leaves you worn out. Now, the children are receiving lots of negative attention and you are getting angrier every minute because you are not winning the battle. Unless you change your response to their behaviour they will do the same the next night because they have no reason not to – after all, it worked last night - they got your attention. The children are not aware that they are attention seeking because this has become their normal bedtime routine. However, they will quickly notice if you change your response to their behaviour.

It is important to sit down with your children and explain routines to them. They must buy into the routine and feel it is a good idea and that there is something in it for them. They must also feel they have some control and some choice. You can agree a checklist of what has to be done as part of the bedtime routine, for example, and then all the family must follow through. When you say goodnight you must mean it.

Then if your child follows you back downstairs instead of getting into an argument with them just say 'it's bed time' and lead them back to bed. Stay calm and don't get into a discussion with them. Make it very matter of fact. This way you are not giving them negative attention. You are stating a fact and you are not getting angry.

It is also important to talk to your child about consequences. This is where they have a choice, they can choose to go to bed and go to sleep and maybe receive a star the next day which will lead to a small reward, or they can choose to get in and out off bed and receive a punishment which may be no TV the next evening or no story before bed.

Children have to know they have a choice and that there are consequences for the decisions they make. A parent's role is to teach children to make good decisions, not to force them to make them. If children are not used to making decisions it will take a little time for them to feel they have control over their behaviour and that they have the power to make the right decisions.

In all situations with children misbehaving you must think before you speak and ask yourself, do I need to become involved in this behaviour? Have I given them a choice? What am I teaching them by behaving this way towards them? For example if you are in the kitchen preparing dinner and your children are fighting over a toy, your immediate reaction may be to jump in and sort it all out.

However, what are you teaching your children by doing this? You are saying 'I am the adult I have the power and I will say what's what' and usually children then feel hard done by and forget about their argument with their sibling and focus on how unfair the parent is. Instead you can give them a choice, one, they can go into another room and sort out the problem or two, you will remove the toy so neither of them can play with it. By so doing, you are allowing them the opportunity to learn problem solving skills.

To give it any more attention than this would be giving them negative attention. Later when they are playing nicely you can praise them. It is important to spend at least twenty minutes quality time with your children every day. Often we are so busy we don't do this and then children look for our attention in any way they can get it. In these twenty minutes you need to be able to give your full attention to the child.