

# ATTENTION-SEEKING

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Attention-seeking is the most common type of misbehaviour in children. Attention-seekers want to keep their parents busy or keep them in their service. There are two types of attention-seeking behaviours – “help me” behaviours and “notice me” behaviours. “Help me” behaviours include; feigned incompetence, laziness, forgetfulness and untidiness. These are all great ways for kids to keep their parents busy with them. “Notice me” behaviours include; eating problems, clowning, the walking question mark, constant interruptions, showing-off and whining. These behaviours are usually very effective at gaining unwarranted attention as they are very difficult to ignore. Parents often unknowingly encourage children’s attention-seeking behaviour by constantly responding to it.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD’S BEHAVIOUR IS GENUINE OR ATTENTION-SEEKING?

Check how you feel when children misbehave. If you feel annoyed or irritated then that is a sure guide that it is attention-seeking behaviour you are dealing with.

If you are still unsure, ask yourself:

‘Would the behaviour stop if I ignored it?’ If the answer is yes, then it’s attention-seeking, as it requires feedback to continue.

## HOW TO CHANGE ATTENTION-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

- **As difficult as it seems you need to ignore attention-seeking behaviour as much as possible.** The easiest way to ignore misbehaviour is to put your attention elsewhere when kids misbehave. If necessary, correct a child, but in a low-key manner to give him or her little attention.
- **Provide lots of positive attention** – play, talk, encourage, value their contributions and achievements. In the absence of positive attention, children will settle for second-best – negative attention such as nagging or even punishment. At least you know they are around!
- **Help attention-seekers feel useful.** Let them know that they don’t have to resort to cheap tricks to gain a sense of belonging in their family. Make sure each child does something around the home that someone else relies on. Help them belong through positive contribution rather than through poor behaviour.

- **Spend time with them.** Read, play, chat or just relax together. Our limited time with children needs to be enjoyed rather than spent reacting to or trying to change poor behaviour.
- **Catch children being good.** Children need to get the message that cooperative behaviour gets them more attention than negative behaviour. Ignore the poor and accentuate the positive is the message here.
- **At times some children may feel neglected or think that a brother or sister is receiving all your attention.** If this happens plan to have some one-to-one time with each child. Develop a special interest that you share with each child in your family so you have something in common.
- **Help each child develop a sense of other.** That is, your children need to understand that the family doesn’t always revolve around them, which tends to be the case with many attention-seekers.



Parenting *ideas*  
MICHAEL GROSE