

## INTERVENTIONS FOR BEHAVIOR

### Breaking the Attention-Seeking Habit: The Power of Random Positive Teacher Attention

#### Purpose:

To break attention-seeking behavior through the use of random positive attention.

#### Description:

Some students misbehave because they are trying to attract teacher attention. Surprisingly, many students who value adult attention don't really care if it is positive (praise) or negative attention (reprimands)--they just want attention! Unfortunately, instructors with students who thrive on teacher attention can easily fall into a reprimand trap. The scenario might unfold much like this:

First, the student misbehaves. Then the teacher approaches the student and reprimands him or her for misbehaving. Because the student finds the negative teacher attention to be reinforcing (better than no attention), he or she continues to misbehave and the teacher naturally responds by reprimanding the student more often! An escalating, predictable cycle is established, with the student repeatedly acting-out and teacher reprimanding him or her.

Teachers can break out of this cycle, though, by using random positive attention with students. Essentially, the instructor starts to ignore student attention-seeking behaviors, while at the same time randomly giving the student positive attention. That is, the student receives regular positive teacher attention but at times unconnected to misbehavior. So the student still gets the adult attention that he or she craves. More importantly, the link between student misbehavior and resulting negative teacher attention is broken.

#### Materials:

No materials necessary.

### Procedure/Steps:

#### Step 1: Select How the Teacher Will Show Positive Attention to the Student.

The key to this intervention strategy is that the teacher will be giving the student regular positive attention at times of his or her choosing. It is important, then, for the teacher to put together a list of ways to deliver positive attention that (a) can be done quickly, without disrupting classroom instruction, and (b) the student actually finds rewarding. Here are a few ideas for giving positive attention:

- Pat the student on the shoulder
- Make eye contact and smile at the student
- Check in with the student about how he or she is progressing with an assignment
- Call on the student in class (when you are pretty sure that he or she knows the answer!)
- Pass the student a note with a cheerful comment, specific praise, or compliment
- Give brief, specific praise about the student's work or behavior (e.g., "I really like to see how carefully you are drawing that map, Joanna!")
- Give the student a few words of encouragement
- Invite the student to summarize for the group the main points of a classroom discussion
- Converse briefly with the student
- Select the student to carry out a classroom task (e.g., passing out papers) that he or she likes

#### Step 2: Decide How Frequently the Teacher Will Give Random Positive Attention to the Student During a Class.

The teacher now needs to figure out how often during a class period he or she will approach the student to give positive attention. Generally, this intervention works best if the teacher is able to give the student a fairly high level of positive attention, at least at the outset. One good way for the teacher to estimate how frequently to provide positive attention is to observe a student across several class periods. The instructor keeps track of how frequently (e.g., once every 5 minutes) the student tries to capture the teacher's attention with problem behaviors. When the teacher has a good idea of how often the student typically seeks attention, he or she can plan to counter the misbehavior by giving the student random positive attention at the same rate. Note: A teacher can simply estimate the student's rate of attention-getting behavior based on past experience with him or her.

#### Step 3: The Teacher Chooses the time(s) and setting(s) in Which to Use Random Positive Attention.

If the target student engages in attention-seeking during only certain times of the day or in particular locations (e.g., just after lunch in math class), the teacher can limit this intervention to just those time periods. If the student seems to be attention-seeking most of the time and in most locations, however, the teacher may want to use the random attention strategy across a greater part of the school day.

**Step 4: Start the Random Attention Intervention.**

Unlike some intervention ideas, random teacher attention does not require that the student be formally trained in its use. Just start the intervention! There are just two simple rules:

Rule 1: Whenever the student inappropriately tries to get the teacher's attention, the instructor either (a) ignores the student or (b) in a neutral manner, quietly and briefly redirects the child to task. The teacher then continues teaching.

Rule 2: During a given class session, whenever the student is due for positive teacher attention, the teacher observes the student. If the student is not engaged in attention-seeking behavior when the teacher glances at him or her, the instructor immediately approaches the student and briefly delivers positive attention (using a choice from the list developed in Step 1). Then continue teaching. Otherwise, the teacher simply ignores the student's attention-seeking behavior and continues teaching.

**Step 5: Fade the Successful Intervention Over Time.**

Once the teacher finds that random positive attention has significantly reduced or eliminated the student's attention-seeking behavior, the instructor can gradually fade the intervention. Each week, the instructor reduces the number of times that he or she approaches the student with positive attention--until the teacher is only occasionally providing that attention. If at any point in the fading process, the teacher discovers that the student begins again to act in an attention-seeking manner, the teacher can temporarily increase the rate of random positive attention until the student's behavior improves. Then the teacher continues fading the attention.

**Hints for Using The Power of Random Positive Teacher Attention:**

Teach other instructors to use random attention. After you have experienced success with this strategy, teach other educators who work with the child to use the intervention. Share with them your list of positive ways to show random attention to the student.

Evaluation of Effectiveness:

Comparison of student behavior before and after implementation.

Sources:

Courtesy of: <http://www.interventioncentral.org>