

Written by *Decca Knight*

parent in training

Attention is Attention is Attention

Think about the last day you spent with your child. How many times did you give a command, redirect, scold, or discipline him? Was it five, ten, or twenty times? Now consider how many positive interactions you had with him in that same period. How many times did you encourage, notice, or have a loving one-on-one interaction with him? Of the hundreds of parents I have asked this question to, many say that their negative interactions outweigh their positive interactions.

Why is this? In our hurried lives, it is often all we can do to “keep the boat afloat.” We wake up in the morning with a certain amount of stress that continues to build throughout the day. In this mindless state, we are often reactive instead of proactive. We shout at our kids to get their shoes on. We scold them for being too loud in the minivan. We send them to time-out five times a day. Many of these interactions are undoubtedly necessary. We have to create limits and boundaries for our child. However, such exchanges often become the foundation of a relationship between a parent and child. A child soon learns that in order to get my parent’s attention, I have to create chaos. Only then will my parent will acknowledge me. Only then will they see me.

Counter such interactions with the special moments. The moment when we notice our child’s laughter and we chuckle with them. The time we compliment them for holding the door open for their sister. The time when we sit, face-to-face, and listen intently to the intricacies of our child’s daily cafeteria experience. Often these moments of positive interaction pale in comparison to the negative exchanges between a parent and child.

For many children, attention is attention is attention. The form it takes doesn’t matter. Children crave our attention, so badly, that they will often do whatever it takes to grab it. So, how do we shift our family narrative? How do we decrease the negative attention seeking behaviors? We try to have as many positive interactions as we do negative or correction interactions. For every scolding tone we use, we find a time to encourage. For every time-out, we have a period of snuggling. For every barked order, we notice something new or different about our child.

For families that are really struggling, I encourage them to schedule an un-interrupted fifteen-minute period with their child each day. This time should be led by the child and should include quality interactions. Sitting by them on the couch while they play video games or watch TV does not suffice. You could go on a walk together, work on an art project, or play an I-Spy game. This time is part of your daily schedule, no matter what. Parents are often amazed at the changes they see when they intentionally work to increase the positive dynamic between them and their child.

Remember, all of us crave attention from those we love. Let us, as the guides for our children, create an environment in which they don’t have to seek us out. We find them and we see them in all their glory.

Decca is a wife, mother, counselor, and parenting educator. In an effort to further help kids and parents, Decca began studying a variety of parenting philosophies. She teaches classes, consults with other “Parents-in-training,” and runs Blue Ridge Parenting and Consulting LLC. For more information about parenting classes and consultation visit Decca’s website www.blueridgeparenting.com

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