

PAUQUETTE NEWS

The Pauquette Center for Psychological Services Newsletter

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Are You Paying Attention?

By Jocelyn Miller, Ph.D.

“Mom, mom, look at me!” So says the 4-year-old as she slides down the slide or rides her tricycle for the first time. Children crave attention, but they are not the only ones. All humans want others to pay attention to them; it is part of our basic social nature.

What happens when people don't get the attention they desire? Often times, they end up seeking attention in negative ways, without even knowing what they are doing. I am reminded of a couple whose primary way of connecting was through fighting. If the husband was not provoking the wife into an argument, she was too busy to pay attention to him, and was spending her time on the computer or with the television. When he got her to argue with him, her attention was focused only on him, and he liked that without being aware of it.

Children seek attention in negative ways as well. They often squabble with their siblings as a way of competing for parental attention. Sometimes they break rules or do other things that they know they shouldn't do, just in order to get some attention.

Negative attention seeking means more than the person doing annoying or “bad” behavior in order to get attention from others. Negative attention seeking also means that the person who craves the attention does not necessarily care if the attention they get is positive and loving, or negative and angry. Many a child feels powerful when they succeed at getting a parent to yell at them – at least the parent is paying 100% attention to them, and not to anyone else.

What can you do if you are in a relationship with someone who seems to be seeking attention from you, particularly if they are doing so via negative behaviors? The first step is to make sure that you are noticing when and how you are paying attention to them. When they speak to you, are you making eye contact with them? Are you responding with a “yes” or “umm-hmmm” to show them that you are listening?

The second step is to set a goal of paying attention to the other person when they are doing things you like. For the couple described above, the wife started to make time for her husband every evening when she got home from work, rather than going directly into “task mode” and paying bills, or watching her own TV shows that he didn't like. Instead of giving him attention when he interrupted her and picked fights, she headed him off at the pass by giving him that same amount of attention in positive ways. She started positive conversations with him, sat next to him, and focused on him when she was with him. Their fighting declined steadily, and they both felt happier in their marriage.

A strategy to fight negative attention seeking behavior in children that I often recommend is called “special time.” Special time is when a parent makes time to be with a child one-on-one, doing something the child enjoys. This can range from 15-20 minutes playing a board game or building with Legos, to a couple of hours out at the park or going shopping. Ideally, special time is scheduled with each child on a weekly basis. That way the child knows that s/he can count on having a parent's attention all to themselves in a regular and predictable way.



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Continued from page 1... Time-out, a very useful form of discipline for children age 1 year through about age 8, is based on this very human need for attention from parents and caregivers. Time-out involves sitting the child on a chair or in a corner, and removing parental attention for a set number of minutes. Time-out only works if the parent is truly ignoring the child – not speaking to them or interacting in any way.

I recommend using a timer to count down the minutes for time-out. The rule of thumb is the child should sit for at least the number of minutes that they are years old (e.g. 5 minutes of quiet behavior in the time-out chair for a 5-year-old), but sometimes the time-out is set for a longer period depending on the type of behavior the child showed.

To learn more about attention and its uses in human relationships, schedule a tune-up with a Pauquette therapist today. Therapy doesn't always have to mean that you are getting into your childhood and all of your emotional issues; it can be a short-term treatment focused on a single, specific goal.



We would like to welcome the following new therapists to Pauquette Center!

Rebecca Trewyn R.N., M.S.N., A.P.N.P. ~ Portage

Lisa Mowbray MSSW, LCSW ~ Baraboo & Portage

Tomi Randall MS, LPC-IT, NCC ~ Columbus & Portage

See a description of all our therapists and their locations @ www.Pauquette.com

New
AND Exciting

***We are excited to
announce our Columbus
location is being remodeled
and expanded to house
4 therapists!***

Check out our Facebook Page for:

- ♦ *Tips and strategies on mental health, wellness, and parenting.*

*Simply scan the QR code
with your phone or go to
www.pauquette.com*



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