

Requesting Attention Teaching Protocol

WHAT IS IT?

Teaching how to request adult attention is a functionally equivalent replacement behavior (FERB) used to reduce challenging behavior when the function of the behavior is attention. The target replacement behavior is an appropriate request for adult attention using a clearly defined and agreed-upon communication mode, such as raising a hand and saying “Excuse me”.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Teaching an appropriate way to request attention replaces challenging attention-seeking behaviors with functional communication. This increases independent communication, reduces frustration, and improves social interactions. When the learner uses a socially acceptable request and receives attention, problem behaviors maintained by attention are less likely to occur.

WHEN DO I USE IT?

Use this strategy when a student engages in challenging behaviors to gain attention, as determined by a functional behavior assessment or a direct observation using ABC data. Teaching a request for attention is appropriate when the student has limited ways to access attention and when challenging behaviors interfere with participation at school, at home, or in the community. Use it during daily routines where adult or peer attention is limited or delayed.

HOW DO I IMPLEMENT IT?

1. **Clearly [define](#)** the target behavior and **Identify the function**. First, confirm that the challenging behavior functions as escape before using this strategy.
2. **Work with your SLP to identify a communication mode** that is quick and efficient for the learner to use and easy for adults to recognize and respond to. The selected communication mode must be clearly defined and used consistently by all adults working with the learner (e.g., raising a hand and saying “Excuse me,” using a picture card, activating a device).
3. **Determine the situation where the skill will be taught** (i.e., direct instruction, during a situation or task where challenging behaviors related to attention will occur).
4. **Teach the target replacement skill** by prompting the learner to request adult attention immediately before challenging behavior is likely to occur. When the learner uses the target replacement skill, provide immediate and enthusiastic attention. This strengthens the connection between the appropriate request and access to adult attention.
5. **Prompt the target replacement skill** using a [prompting hierarchy](#) that matches the learner’s needs (e.g., full physical, partial physical, model, gesture, verbal, independent). **Prompts should be systematically [faded](#)** as the learner demonstrates increased independence with requesting adult attention.
6. **After the learner receives adult attention** following use of the target replacement

skill, both the adult and learner return to their respective tasks. Adults should continue

HOW DO I IMPLEMENT IT (cont.)?

to prompt the target replacement skill at the first sign that challenging behavior may reoccur.

7. **If challenging behavior occurs**, do not give attention to it. Instead, block or redirect as needed for safety and immediately prompt the learner to use the target replacement skill. Provide corrective feedback such as, “When you want my attention, and I am busy, use your request. Let’s practice.”
8. Once the learner consistently uses the target replacement skill with minimal prompting and challenging behavior remains low, begin **gradually delaying access** to adult attention (e.g., 5 seconds, 10 seconds, 30 seconds). Continue to provide stronger reinforcement for more independent requests.
9. Take data using this [data sheet](#)
10. Train staff using the [fidelity checklist](#)

Implementation Tips:

- Teach the **target replacement skill** proactively using the agreed-upon communication mode
- Prompt and fade the skill using the learner’s documented prompt hierarchy
- Reinforce independent requests immediately and more strongly than prompted requests

Quick Example:

During center time, a young child begins to seek attention. The teacher prompts, “Use your attention card.” The child hands the card to the teacher, who provides immediate attention. Both then return to their activities.

QR CODES FOR MORE LEARNING



How to ABA
Video



Visuals



Social Stories



AMS Selection
Tool



Explainer Video

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