

# Social-Emotional Health

Special Education Services

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## The Power of Positive Attention: Encouraging Appropriate Behaviour and Social Skills

Parental attention is highly motivating for children and is an important factor in the acquisition of skills and the development of self-image. Furthermore, it is well established that positive parental attention is highly effective in encouraging social skills and behaviour change. In fact, research shows that praise for the behavior you want to encourage leads to more success than “calling out” the things you want your child to stop doing.

Children are very good at gaining parents’ attention when they are misbehaving, and that attention is often going to come in the form of discipline. This is largely because it is under these circumstances that a parent’s stress levels increase and they are activated to intervene. The real challenge is to override that natural tendency to react to the negative and, instead, make a conscious effort to generously praise the positive behaviour when it is observed. It’s not easy, but it’s worth it! Everyone ends up a winner. Your child will show more and more of the behaviour that is praised, and both parent and child will feel better about the quality of the time spent together.



### How to make it work:

- Positive attention can take the form of verbal praise, hugs, high fives, or rewards. Mix it up! See what works best with your child.
- Be Specific: Describe the behaviour so your child knows what they are doing well. “I like the way you...”
- Be Sincere: Children can tell if positive attention is not meaningful or not deserved.
- Be Spontaneous: Deliver praise, recognition, rewards at the moment that the behaviour occurs.
- Be Generous: Praise small steps toward the bigger goal. Catch your child making the effort.

**Stick with it!** A Positive Attention approach takes persistence and patience. It may take some practice before it becomes second nature. The benefits are huge as positive attention can result in a stronger bond with your child.