

# Is It Attention-Seeking?

*What it really means, and what to do instead*

You've probably heard "just ignore it, they're doing it for attention." **Here's the truth:** needing attention isn't a flaw. Connection is a real need. When a child uses whining, interrupting, or acting out to get it, they're telling you they don't yet have an easier way. Your job isn't to withhold attention; it's to teach a better way to ask for it.

## Signs it may be about connection

- It happens when you're on the phone, cooking, or with a sibling.
- It stops quickly once you look, talk, or come over.
- It's "worse" on busy or stressful days with less one-on-one time.

## Check first: it may be something else

- Distress (a meltdown) is not attention-seeking. Comfort first.
- Pain, hunger, or tiredness can look like acting out.
- Escaping a hard task looks different and needs a different plan.

## What to do instead

- ☐ **Fill the tank first.** Give attention before they ask: 5–10 minutes of full, phone-down, child-led play each day goes a long way.
- ☐ **Catch them being good.** Notice and name the calm moments: "I love how you waited for me." Make it specific and frequent.
- ☐ **Teach the easy way to ask.** A tap on the arm, a card, a sign, or words like "Play with me?" Practice it when everyone is calm.
- ☐ **Answer the easy way, fast.** When they use it, respond right away, especially at first. It has to work better than the old way.
- ☐ **Keep reactions to the old way small and calm.** Short, neutral, no big emotion, then redirect to the easy way. This is not the same as ignoring your child.
- ☐ **Give a "when" for busy moments.** "I'm on the phone. When the timer beeps, it's your turn." Then follow through.

### Why this works

Children repeat what works. If the only reliable way to get you is a big reaction, that's what you'll see. When asking nicely works better and faster, behavior shifts, and your child learns their needs matter.

### Not sure what's driving the behavior?

Behavior always has a reason, and it isn't always attention. A behavior consultation or parent coaching session can help you find the "why" and build a simple plan that fits your family.

[Book a free consultation](#)

ACCEPT. UNDERSTAND. LOVE.