

TIP SHEET

Getting Someone's Attention



Have you ever had one of these experiences?

- You are having a conversation (with another adult or a child) and a child starts talking to you, interrupting your conversation.
- You are playing with a group of children and another child yells your name from across the room, asking for help.
- A young child pulls at your clothes or your hand to get you to help them or to show you something?

Most Early Childhood Educators can identify with these situations. The common problem here is that many young children do not know how to get someone's attention in a polite and appropriate manner. Therefore, when they need your attention they simply call your name or tug at you, regardless of what you may be doing at the time.

Some children also have a hard time getting another child's attention in an appropriate way. They may hit or yell at the other child to get his attention. Children need to learn the appropriate way to get someone's attention. Like other social skills, this skill can be taught.

We have provided two strategies that you can use to help teach children this important social skill:

Helping Children Learn How to Get Someone's Attention

1) Social Scripts

What is a Social Script?

A Social Script is a method of teaching children how to behave in specific social situations. It might include a short description of a challenging social situation and then it provides suggestions of specific things the child can say or do in response to the social situation.

How do I use a Social Script?

It is best to work on one script at a time in order to keep things clear for the child.

Review and practice the social script at least once a day when it is first introduced. As the child begins to understand and use the new skill, you can practice the script less often and refer back to it to remind the child what to do in specific situations.

It is not a good idea to try using the Social Script while the situation is happening. Instead, review it at the beginning of the day and then, when the situation actually occurs, you can remind the children of the strategies they have learned.

When I want to talk to someone, I:

- *Stand close to them and tap them gently on the shoulder,*
- *Say their name,*
- *Wait for them to look at me,*
- *Talk to them.*

Children can practice the Social Scripts by doing role-plays or by using puppets or dolls.

Depending on the child's skill level, you can write a Social Script using words only or you can add pictures or photographs to help depict each step. Here are some examples of Social Scripts written to help a child learn how to "get someone's attention".

2) Direct Class-Wide Teaching

What is Direct Class-Wide Teaching?

There are some skills that, while particularly challenging for certain students, can be taught to the whole class or to small groups of children.

Using this strategy, you directly teach the whole class specific social skills (what to say and do in a specific social situation) and then give them op-

portunities to practice the skills in a natural environment.

By using class-wide teaching, all children can benefit from learning, practising and being reinforced for a specific skill.

When you are teaching a group of children a social skill, remember that, as with any skill, it might be easy for some children and more challenging for others.

Direct Class-Wide Teaching of social skills is most successful when you are:

- **PATIENT** - some children might need more reminders, more support, and more time to learn and use the skill;
- **CONSISTENT** – make sure that you and any other adults in the child's life have the same expectations of the child;
- **POSITIVE** – remember to spot children using the skill and reinforce them as much and as specifically as possible.

Here is an example of how to use Direct Class-Wide Teaching to teach children how to get someone's attention:

Facilitate

Facilitate a discussion that gets the children thinking about the skill.

"How can you get someone's attention if they are talking to someone?"

"How can you get someone's attention if they are far from you?"

Teach

Teach the children a rule that will help them understand and use the skill. A Social Script can be helpful at this stage.

"When you want to get someone's attention, you must tap them on the shoulder, say their name,

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and then wait for them to look at you. When they are looking at you, you can start talking to them.”

Role play

Give the children an opportunity to practice the skill by doing a role play or puppet show.

At first, two adults can do the role play and then encourage the children to try. Demonstrate a correct and incorrect way to get someone's attention so that the children are very clear about the words and actions that you are expecting.

Reinforce

Tell the children that you will be watching for this skill for a week. Reinforce children who display the skill and remember to label the behaviour that you want to see.

“Wow! I just saw Dong-Woo tap Annabelle on the shoulder, say her name, and wait for her to look before talking to her. That's great, Dong-Woo! You got Annabelle's attention before talking to her.”

Review

Talk about the skill for a few minutes each day so that it is fresh in the children's minds and reinforces the importance of social skills.

At the end of the week, facilitate a discussion so that the children can talk about how it felt using the skill throughout the week.

“Who remembered how to get someone's attention this week?”

“How did it feel when someone got your attention in a polite way?”

As an Early Childhood Educator, you play a very important role in helping children learn how to behave in social situations. Not only do you model appropriate social behaviour, but now you are actively teaching it, too.

When your students start using the skills you have taught them to get someone's attention, your room will be a calmer, more positive, and pleasant environment for everyone.

For more information:

- Take a look at some of the other social skills in this section such as: [Listening to Others](#), [Turn Taking](#), [Sharing](#), [Joining in Play](#) and [Personal Space](#).
- Visit our workshops on [Playing to Learn](#), [Reinforcement](#), and [Visual Communication](#).