



Positive attention and your child

Key points

- **Positive attention is when you respond to your child with warmth and interest.**
- **Positive attention helps your child feel secure and valued.**
- **Positive attention is important for your child's self-image and development.**
- **You can use everyday moments to give your child positive attention.**

What is positive attention?

Positive attention is the way you show delight in your child and warmth in your relationship through:

- smiling at your child
- making eye contact and using caring facial expressions
- showing physical affection – for example, hugging your child
- using words to celebrate and encourage your child
- showing interest in your child's interests, activities and achievements.

Why positive attention is important

From birth, children need experiences and relationships that show them they're valued, capable human beings who bring pleasure to others. Positive attention, reactions and responses from key grown-ups help children build a picture of how valued they are.

Your **child's self-image** builds up over time with positive, loving messages from you and other important people in your child's life. A healthy self-image is very important, not only for your child's relationship with others, but also for your child's confidence as they learn about the world.

Your child's feelings of security and safety come from responsive interactions with you and other carers. If you smile at your child when they look towards you, or reassure your child when they're frightened or uncertain, your child will feel safe and secure. This gives your child confidence as they explore their world.



All children do best in an environment where they're supported, encouraged and enjoyed. In fact, warm and positive relationships are key to children's development (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/understanding-development/relationships-development>).

How to show positive attention: all ages

There are many ways to give your child positive attention. Daily activities like changing a nappy, supervising a bath or walking to school let you connect with your child in meaningful ways. For example, you can give positive attention by cuddling and tickling your toddler while you're drying them after a bath. Or you can sit with your arm around your child while you watch television together.

No matter what your child's age, there are simple things you can do every day to send the message that your child is special and important. For example:

- Look at your child and smile.
- Show interest in what your child is doing – ask your child to tell you about it if they can.
- Pay attention and listen closely when your child talks to you.
- Create some special family rituals (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/family-life/routines-rituals/family-rituals>) you can share together.
- Make time to be with your child, doing things you enjoy together.
- Praise (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/connecting/praise>) your child when they try out a new skill or make an effort with something – for example, 'That's a really beautiful drawing! Where did you learn to use shading like that?'

There are also ways you can show positive attention to children of different ages.

Newborns and babies: positive attention tips

Even before babies can understand and use words, they respond to your tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions and body language.

Here are ways to give your baby positive attention:

- Smile when your baby smiles at you.
- Comfort your baby when they cry.

- Respond to the sounds your baby makes by saying something in return.
- Chat about what's going on around the two of you.
- Notice what your baby is interested in and encourage baby to explore – for example, show baby how to shake a colourful rattle that has caught their eye.

Toddlers: positive attention tips

As children get older, they understand more of what you say, as well as how you say it. Here are some tips for positive attention at this age:

- Get into the moment with your child. This could be as simple as crouching down to look at a caterpillar together.
- When you're talking together, leave time after you talk so your child can reply.
- When you're playing with your child, comment on what your child is doing, without correcting them or trying to get them to do something differently – for example, 'Wow, that's a very tall tower! I wonder how many more blocks before it falls down'.
- Tell your child exactly what you like about what they're doing. For example, 'I love it when you help to pick up the blocks'.

Preschoolers: positive attention tips

There are so many ways you can give your preschooler positive attention as they learn about the world. For example:

- Make time to do your child's favourite activities together – for example, jigsaws, Lego, painting and so on.
- Remember to smile and make eye contact with your child when you greet them in the morning – perhaps even take a moment for a special cuddle.
- Show your child you're happy to see them after child care or preschool. Tell your child that you missed them, or give hugs and high fives.

School-age children and pre-teens: positive attention tips

Children's worlds expand when they go to school. But your warmth and positive attention are still the biggest influences on your child's development.

Try these ideas:

- Stop what you're doing and listen when your child wants to talk about school. This might not always be as soon as your child gets home – it might be when your child is in the bath or just before they go to sleep.
- Ask your child about one good thing that happened during the day.
- Ask follow-up questions when your child starts talking. This keeps the conversation going.
- Notice and guide your child's positive interactions with others – for example, 'I think Hunter really liked it when you asked her questions about her holiday. It gave her a chance to talk about something that was important to her'.
- If you need to provide constructive feedback, give some positive messages at the same time – for example, 'Usually you're such a good sharer. I can see it's hard just now, but think about how your friends feel when you don't let them have a turn.'



Before you correct your child, ask yourself: does it really matter, or could I just let it go? If you're always correcting your child, this sends the message that your child isn't capable or valued.

Positive attention: how it adds up over time

Over time, it's important to give your child more positive attention than criticism or negative attention. If you can give your child positive attention most of the time, your child will have a strong sense of being secure and loved. This will also outweigh those occasional times when you feel frustrated or distracted, or you can't give your child as much attention as you'd like.



If many of your daily interactions with your child are negative, or if it's hard for you to feel or act positively with your child, it's worth seeking professional help. Start by seeing your GP or a counsellor. These professionals can help you get your relationship with your child back on track – your relationship might even end up stronger.

References

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External links

- [The Mindful Parent \(http://themindfulparent.org/\)](http://themindfulparent.org/)

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