

Parent Child Journey

An Individualized Approach to Raising Your Challenging Child

by Dan Shapiro, MD

Fourth Mile: Motivation through Positive Attention

This is the first of three sessions on the important subject of motivation. In this Fourth Mile, we will review how to give positive attention in a way that's meaningful and effective for your child. In the Fifth Mile, you will learn how to motivate by using natural consequences and logical sequences. In the Sixth Mile, we will cover use (and misuse) of rewards.

Risks of using external motivation

1. Missing the root of the problem:
2. Undermining natural drive:
3. Prolonging dependence

How to give positive attention

- Simple noticing
- Individualized positive attention
 - Verbal
 - Nonverbal
 - Visual communication can be very effective
 - Applause combines sights and sounds of congratulations
 - Don't forget touch
 - Adjust your "volume" or "intensity"
- Praise immediately
- Pay attention to process over product
- Spacing and fading positive attention

Levels of external reinforcement:

- Intensity
- Immediacy
- Frequency
- Distance

Current level of dependence:

- Dependent: High intensity, immediate, frequent, and close.
- Transitional: Faded, delayed, irregular, and distant.
- Independent: No external reinforcement is needed.

Fading and spacing positive attention for independent work and play

After securing your child's attention, clearly communicate a *two-part command*:

1. I want you to do _____ and
2. I do not want you to interrupt (call, get, cry for, etc.) me while I _____.

For example,

I want you to _____:

- Go to sleep
- Do your homework
- Play with your toys
- Read your book
- Practice piano
- Choose something to do from your activity menu

And I don't want you to interrupt while I _____:

- Talk on the phone
- Do my work
- Talk to these people (visiting or visited)
- Rest
- Make dinner

After two-part command, jump-start, then gradually space and fade positive attention to promote independence. For:

- sleep
- homework
- morning routine
- evening routines
- play
- chores
- self-care

Homework for the Fourth Mile

1. Keep up time-in.
2. Keep up good technique for ensuring engagement and understanding.
3. Practice: giving frequent, immediate, individualized positive attention:
 - a. "Catch 'em being good."
 - b. Attend to "process/ how", not just "product / what."
 - c. Customize how you give positive attention according to your child's unique profile.
4. Promote independence by giving sufficient positive attention and then spacing and fading.