

# Summary: Mindful Attention

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## Why Positive Attention?

You can't always control your child's behavior, but you can control how you respond to it. One of the most powerful tools for shaping your child's behavior is positive attention. By focusing on specific behaviors you want to see more often, and reinforcing those behaviors with immediate, genuine praise, you create a positive feedback loop.

Teens with ADHD or emotional regulation challenges often receive more negative feedback than their peers. This makes it especially important to highlight and encourage the positive things they do. The more we reinforce positive actions, the more likely we are to see those behaviors repeated.

## How to Boost Positive Attention

You can strengthen the impact of your positive attention by:

- Making praise immediate: Catch your teen in the moment of doing something right.
- Being specific: Focus on the exact behavior you want to encourage.
- Making it genuine: Avoid adding "buts" or sarcasm that could weaken your message.

For example: instead of saying: *"Thanks for not leaving a mess,"* try: *"Thanks for rinsing your dishes and putting them in the sink!"*

## What is a Behavior?

Behaviors are observable and measurable actions. This means focusing on what your teen *does* rather than vague qualities. For example, instead of saying, "Be respectful," you might praise them for "waiting their turn to talk."

## Selective Attention

Some behaviors are best addressed by giving them less attention. If your child is engaging in attention-seeking behaviors (like whining or arguing), consider using selective attention. This means briefly removing your attention from the behavior and re-engaging when they shift to positive or neutral actions.

Selective attention is not the same as the "silent treatment." It's a purposeful, short-term strategy to redirect behavior and reinforce positive actions.

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## Selective Attention, continued

Tips for using attention mindfully:

- Acknowledge “baby steps” toward the behavior you want to see.
- Prepare a few praise phrases in advance to use when emotions are high.
- Ignore behaviors like eye-rolling or back talk by staying calm and avoiding reactions.
- Once the unwanted behavior stops, quickly re-engage with positive attention.

## Home Practice

1. Find 1 opportunity every day to practice positive attention.
2. Let go of 1 “battle” by using selective attention for minor, attention-seeking behaviors (e.g., arguing, whining).
3. Continue daily 1:1 Time, focusing on connecting and letting your child lead the activity.

Remember to use specific, genuine praise to encourage positive behaviors, and remove your attention from minor attention-seeking actions. Your consistency in how you respond is what makes a big difference!