

5 P's Transcript

If you want to help your child start paying attention, one of the things you can do is to stop telling them to pay attention. When you tell a child to pay attention they don't really know what you're talking about. They wind up arguing about whether they are paying attention. They tell you that they heard you, you tell them that they weren't listening, and at the end of the day we haven't gotten very far. It's important to redefine what we mean by paying attention so it's easier to teach skills and give feedback to your child. So one of the things I emphasize is what I call the five P's of attention. The first P is, is the child Positioned for attention. Are they looking at you? Are their body posture correct? Are their hands free? If they're not positioned for attention, they are less likely to pay attention. Think of an athlete listening to the coach, with a knee on the ground, the ball next to their body, their eyes on the coach. That's an example of what we mean by being positioned to pay attention. That way when you give a child feedback about whether they're paying attention, you have something specific to refer to. Great, your eyes are on me. That's super, your hands are free. Your body is in the position to focus and follow what I have to say. You can also ask your child whether they are paying attention, and they can reflect on their body positioning and they can say, "Yes, I'm looking at you."

Another P involved in the five P's of paying attention is whether a child is participating. Are they raising their hand? Are they answering questions? Are they taking their turn? Teachers often value the kids who are participating as a way of showing that they are interested and paying attention.

A third element is whether a child is being productive. Are they marching towards their goal? Very few parents and teachers have concerns about their child's attention when the kids are getting their work done. Frankly, if kids get their work done, we often don't care whether they are paying attention or not.

Another element in the five P's is whether you have a purpose. Whether you are paying attention and getting things done that you choose to get done. If you go out to the garage to do a task such as draining the hose, and you end up checking the nuts and bolts and putting them in the drawers, you're not accomplishing the purpose that you set out to do. You're not getting done what you chose to get done. We're all paying attention to something, but are we paying attention to what we decide to pay attention to.

The last P is whether you are present. Whether your mind is in the moment. If you're having dinner but you're not thinking about the food, your senses are not directed to the food, you're watching TV or listening to an audio book, you are not present. Your mind is not in the moment. So if someone is talking to you and you're watching something else or thinking about something else, you are not present. So it's important to use these five P's to talk about what we mean by paying attention.