



A Sequential Response to Attention-Seeking Behavior at First Unitarian Church of Hamilton

Are they just extra energetic? Are they willing to take negative attention because there hasn't been enough positive attention? Are they bored with the pace of our activity? Is there an underlying social or medical reason for their difficulty?

Ministering to children means remembering that

> there may be an explanation for the behaviour (other than a desire to drive you nuts!)
> we must take care to separate how we feel about a person from how we feel about their behaviour.

All of the children of the church deserve our care, concern and love ... no matter how frustrating we may occasionally find their behaviour. Some children just require extra grace.

We therefore approach children who are upset, overly talkative or boisterous on the assumption that they know what a good experience at church is like, but need our assistance to settle or focus.

At church, we routinely use the following sequential response to difficulty attending.

1. Gently call the child's name

2. Move nearer or next to the child momentarily

A light reminding touch on the shoulder or eye contact may help to bring the child back to the group or activity. If necessary, matter-of-factly tell the child that if they are too tempted by distracting objects or people, that we will next need to move them away from the distracting object(s) or person(s).

3. Ask the child to move

Away from the distraction closer to you or your co-leader with others to whom s/he will not be tempted to talk.

If necessary, let the child know that time-out, and the possibility of missing the fun, will be the consequence of continuing to act out.

4. Time Out

Move the child to a place where s/he is isolated from any activity but where s/he can still be seen and kept safe by you. Define the duration of the time-out.

NOTE: During the September to June church season, a final resort for children's programmers is that a child leaves the group and stays with the Program Director until a conversation with the parent and child can be had after church about why the day was so difficult for the child.