

# **I Like Teacher Attention Program**

## **Program Directions**

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### Introduction

This is a "coupon program" designed to increase greater self-control in young students (ages 6-12) who are in the habit of seeking too much teacher attention, may be too dependent on teacher attention, and/or they sometimes seek teacher attention through a negative means. The Teacher Attention Program teaches students better self-management so they can learn to moderate their need for teacher attention; and eventually this program leads to the development a new habit of only seeking teacher attention when necessary and seeking it through positive means.

Inappropriate seeking of teacher attention includes such examples as asking for teacher help for things the student can do independently, asking for help without first trying, refusing to engage with school work unless the teacher is involved, asking for help and using that opportunity to socialize with the teacher instead, requesting attention because the student is lonely or tired or bored, requesting attention because other students are getting attention, just to name some of the most common reasons for over-use of teacher attention. This coupon program is usually employed when there are multiple reasons and bad habits have developed.

Inappropriate seeking of teacher attention can happen through a positive means (e.g., raising a hand and waiting patiently, then politely stating the request) or a negative means (engaging in a behavior that can't be ignored, such as running out the door or shouting and causing a disturbance). When students use a positive means, the teacher (once you're with the student) determines if the request was legitimate.

Please refer to the article, Guidelines for Using the Coupon Program at <https://kevinplummerphd.com/> for a complete description of the Coupon Program approach. Also, refer to the Micro Goal Program for additional insights into motivating students to change habits <https://kevinplummerphd.com/micro-goal-programming/>.

Seeking too much attention can easily be classified as misbehavior or a conduct problem (if a negative means is used), so it may often be treated with various forms of discipline and constant limit setting (negative consequences following the behavior). This can become a chronic occurrence throughout the school day, which runs the risk of shaping a negative student identity (<https://kevinplummerphd.com/shaping-student-identity/>) and creating negative relationships between the student and the teacher and the student and other students. Furthermore, without a focus on the skill that is needed to replace the "conduct problem", sustainable success is extremely unlikely.

Instead, we want to treat the problem like a skill deficit and a bad habit, which provides hope that the skill can be improved and the habit reversed. Successful programming, then, provides skill practice and student efforts are reinforced through recognition and reward. In addition to recognition (which shapes a positive student identity) and reward (earning credit, a feeling of success); support for developing this new skill also includes

scripted verbal feedback and redirection from the teacher (for better internalization and memory management) and continuous visual feedback on performance (a coupon for self-monitoring) to enable increased student awareness of how close they are to achieving their goal. Taken all together, this has the potential to be a much more potent program than a discipline/negative consequence approach.

A key component of this program is comprehension, i.e., increasing student awareness about age-appropriate social conventions for seeking teacher attention, increasing student awareness about the extent of the problem, defining the problem with clarity, and helping students understand the level of effort it will take to remedy it.

Comprehension is a critical ingredient in any behavior intervention effort. Sometimes a comprehension breakdown is the primary source of the problem. For more information about the role of social comprehension in the development of improved student behavior, see <https://kevinplummerphd.com/improving-comprehension-of-the-nuances-of-routines/>. As with other therapeutic programs that incorporate social comprehension, the I Like Teacher Attention Program materials include a student comprehension guide in the form of an I Like Teacher Attention book and an I Like Teacher Attention story (reviewed as needed throughout the program). There are also I Like Teacher Attention coupons which serve as the visual feedback mechanism, as well as the reward mechanism (the earned coupons can be put toward a reward).

The pages of the I Like Teacher Attention book are "two up" on the page so they can be printed and then cut in half and stapled into a guidebook. This Comprehension Guide should be read with the student a few times before starting the rest of the program. The I Like Teacher Attention Story has the same content as the book, but it's condensed onto a few pages. That format might appeal more to older elementary school and young middle school students, and it's easier (than the guidebook) to reference quickly when needed, after the program starts.

## Implementation

**Step one** is to review the book with the student several times, until you determine that the student has full comprehension of the problem. Users should feel free to alter the content (add specific examples and delete what is not relevant) to reflect your specific student who needs the program. The example connected with this program was written with one particular student in mind, but you will see that a lot of it is generalizable.

**Step two** is to explain how to use the coupons. The coupon is labeled at the top with the skill the student is working on (Work on Using Teacher Attention the Right Way). Point this out to the student. Remind the student about the appropriate reasons for seeking teacher attention and the examples of inappropriate seeking attention, and point out where the coupon shows this. It is sometimes helpful to refer back to the story, where all this is explained, as the coupon is introduced and explained.

In addition, by using a timer or by identifying various stopping points within the task, let the student know when the teacher will be back to spend some time helping or checking the work. For example, if teacher attention is appropriate to check student seatwork after problem three, that number should be circled, and perhaps put a T next to it (to tell the student to raise a hand to call the teacher over to check, once problem 3 is completed). This is supplying contingent teacher attention. Teacher attention is contingent on (and reinforcing of) productive behavior, rather than nonproductive behavior (e.g., doing no work, acting inappropriately, etc.).

Explain that there are three ways to get credit on the coupon for using teacher attention the right way.

- A. Keep working hard by yourself and your teacher will notice and give you credit
- B. Finish the work up to the teacher check point and ask the teacher to check
- C. Try your best and then ask for help when you need it.

Explain that the goal is to fill up all the credit boxes (6) before the reminder boxes are full (3). That is a successful coupon and it can be saved for the incentive (the credits from the coupon can be doubled and added to the student's credit sheet—for programs that use The Credit Program—and successful coupons can be put into a bank to be cashed in later for the incentive). Following a successful coupon, a student can immediately start working on another one. For more information about credit programs see (<https://kevinplummerphd.com/credit-program/>)

Also, explain different examples of violations of using teacher attention and show where this reminder is summarized on the coupon (a summary, so not all these examples).

- A. The teacher randomly checks in and finds out the student has not been working hard
- B. The student indicates that it's time for the teacher to check, but the teacher finds out the student did not actually reach the check point in the work.
- C. The student calls the teacher over for help and the teacher finds that the student has not tried at all to figure it out.
- D. The student tries to get teacher attention by doing something wrong, like wandering around the room or causing a disturbance
- E. The student asks for help, but really just wants to talk instead of doing work.

Explain that any of these violations will use one of the reminder boxes. An X will be put in the empty reminder box. Caution the student about filling up all the reminder boxes. Once all these boxes are full, the coupon has to be discarded and the student will start over with a fresh coupon, unable to save any of the credits already earned in the credit boxes.

**Step three** is to decide when it is best to use the coupons. Coupons are only provided to the student during selected opportunities designated by the teacher (the best opportunities to work on the skill, such as during an independent work period). Choose

a short period of time (at first) to have the student focus on applying the skill (e.g., 20 minutes). Run the program for several short periods at different points in the day, rather than one long and extended period. Each coupon is a learning trial and it is better, at first to have many learning trials than it is to have just one trial that is very long. Throughout the 20 minutes (approximately) periodically (at designated check points and randomly) give the student credit for using the skill (check off a recognition box).

Throughout a short academic period (e.g., 20 minutes) periodically (randomly) check off a box if the student has refrained from impulsively seeking attention (and they have been getting work done). In addition, check off a box if the student has called the teacher over after completing the required work or called for help that is legitimately needed. Each instance of reinforcement should be accompanied by pointing to the visual and commenting with a phrase similar to the coupon (e.g., "I'm giving you credit because you worked on your own and waited for me to check on you, instead of calling me over when you weren't ready").

Within a 20-minute period of using teacher attention the right way it is expected that all the credit boxes would be checked. However, when there are some instances of legitimately needing help, or when the student works hard and reaches the check points quickly, one coupon could be completed and another one started within the same 20-minute period. Any partially completed coupons can be saved until the next opportunity. Any successfully completed coupons can be put aside and used for double credits (sometimes people create a coupon bank and decide that a certain number of coupons can be used to earn a reward).

**Step four** is to use critical periods to increase student motivation, increase student focus on the learning trial and create the most helpful memory of the moment. The critical period is when the student is about to be successful with the coupon (credit boxes are almost full), and at the same time the coupon is about to be lost because of too many reminders.

When there is only one box left in the reminders column the student should be told how much time is left (or how much work is left to do in the time available) and that the next reminder will fill all the boxes, so it will have to be a "try again" ("You have 5 more minutes of working independently and only one reminder box left, so let's have you use teacher attention the right way so you don't have to try again with a new coupon."). Point out how many credit boxes are already filled ("You already have 4 credits earned. Make sure you save those instead of using all your reminders, throwing the whole coupon away and starting over again.").

**Step five** is to increase the difficulty. Students who are eventually successful with ease with the current coupon can graduate to extended coupons. Simply add another row of boxes under the credit boxes and use the coupon for a longer period of time (but do not increase the number of "reminders" boxes). This coupon will be worth more credit when

it is completed, but the effort will have to be sustained for a longer period, without adding any other reminder chances.

### **Generalization, Transition From Coupons**

Once the student is successful with the coupon program, the goal can be incorporated into the student's daily behavioral system as one of the social emotional learning skills the student is working on. For example, the goal can be added to the student's Credit Sheet, and all day long that will be one of the points of focus for issuing credits. This will allow for further generalization and internalization of the skill. For more information about how to incorporate SEL skills into a credit program see <https://kevinplummerphd.com/soft-skills-programming/>. The Credit Sheet should always evolve to reflect what the student is working on.