

Parenting *without* Distraction

The Attunetion[®] Guide



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By: Dr. Craig Pierce
Southwest Family Institute
www.attunetion.com

ATTUNETION
2612 Texas St NE,
Albuquerque NM, 87110
(505) 830-1871

Food for Thought ...

When was the last time someone gave you their
full and **undivided** attention?

Didn't it feel **GREAT**?

We live in a hectic, multitasking world.

Despite a jam-packed schedule, I was determined to carve out time to write this eBook about a topic near to my heart: chronic lack of attention and its impact on families today. As I opened my laptop to get started, I heard that familiar “bing.” Twenty-two emails had just arrived. Fourteen from work; six from family and friends; two from junk mail.

I quickly replied to an urgent request from a colleague. Then, I clicked on a message from my wife. She had sent a link to photographs from our latest vacation. Gorgeous pictures of the beach ... water glistening in the sunset. Happy memories of a great week away.

After enjoying the photos, I logged out. But wait a sec ... why had I come into the office in the first place? Oh, right. I was going to get started writing about raising kids in our increasingly distracted society.

Talk about busted. I had totally lost my focus.

Technology has opened new avenues for keeping in touch, and that's a great thing. Never before has communication been so instantaneous. Never before have we been so connected. And, never before have we been so distracted.

We've ushered in a world where reflective thinking and focus have become increasingly rare. Where the demands of work and home require us to constantly shift mental gears. Where multitasking seems like the only way to cope.

Yet all this distraction comes at a cost. And who is paying the highest price for this distraction?

Our children.

Studies show that when it comes to today's kids, our chronic lack of attention is creating a myriad of emotional and behavioral problems. Issues that are impacting everything from our children's performance at home and school to their ability to make deep and lasting connections in their lives.

So what's the solution?

Parenting without Distraction: The Attunetion® Guide was written specifically to shine a light on this troubling issue. Its goal is to provide food for thought and to offer a simple antidote to the problems created by our chronic lack of attention. That antidote? Learning to pay Attunetion®.



Yes, Attunetion.

Attunetion is a simple approach that I created to help put the sanity back into parenting. And it's as easy as paying attention and tuning into your kids so that you can focus on the right thing ... at the right time ... and in the right way.

Right thing. Right time. Right way.

Sounds easy, right? The Attunetion approach works because if you can do all three — if you can pay attention and tune into the right thing, at the right time, and in the right way — you can create more positive relationships at home, at work, and in every corner of your life.

If you are as concerned as I am about the health and wellbeing of our kids, read on. And if you like this eBook, feel free to send it to everyone you know. Because whether you're a parent, an educator, a health professional or simply someone who is feeling unconnected in today's high-stress world, there is true and lasting value in paying Attunetion.

- 1. Right Thing**
- 2. Right Time**
- 3. Right Way**

Wisdom from the sages...

“ Tell me what you pay attention to and I will
tell you who you are. ”

Jose Ortega y Gasset

Every day, all across America.

At the playground, a toddler struggles to get her father's attention, eager to try the new see-saw. But the man is too engrossed in an email to notice. She finally turns away, crestfallen.

Riding his bike into town, a 10-year old is nearly run off the road by a woman in a mini-van. The mother of three glances up from her GPS just in time to see the boy.

Sitting down with her parents for the first dinner together in a month, the high-school junior wants to broach the topic of college. Before she can, her mother jumps up to turn on Jersey Shore.

We've all done it, haven't we? Gotten so caught up in our "stuff" that we missed the chance to connect with someone important in our lives. And most of the time, we don't even know the opportunity for real connection passed until it's too late.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how distracted do you feel you are as a parent?

¹ Wallis, C. (2010). *The impacts of media multitasking on children's learning and development: Report from a research seminar*, New York, NY: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

² Young, Damon. *Digitally surfing on the flushable sea*. ABC News 24. October 20, 2010.

Today, we can tap into millions of websites and blogs ... have virtual conversations with people around the globe ... and share images and ideas at lightning speed.

For many parents, multitasking seems like the only way to cope with the competing demands on their time and attention. But is this progress?

Not always.

A Stanford University study found that we're actually not juggling things as well as we think. In fact, research shows that multitasking actually "rewires" our brains in negative ways.

Here's an example.

According to a recent survey, most of us reply to emails immediately – many within six seconds. For many, email has become a source of constant interruption throughout the day. Not surprisingly, it also has become one of the biggest obstacles to productivity in the workplace. Because each time you open an email, it takes at least a minute to recover your focus and continue with whatever you were doing.

**How often do
you check email
each day?**

But here's what I mean when I say multitasking is rewiring our brains.

The arrival of each successive email sends a tiny jolt to the brain — a little wake-up call that says, “get ready, new mail is coming.” And so we start checking our email every few minutes, waiting for the next “hit.”

Suddenly, the morning has passed and you're behind schedule at work ... it's dinnertime and supper still isn't on the table ... or it's two in the morning and you're too wired to sleep. And all the while, the email keeps coming.

I'm not pointing the finger at email specifically, but it provides a perfect illustration of how we're being pushed and pulled in too many directions. How the pressures of daily life are creating a culture of distraction.

Not surprisingly, these and other diversions sap our energy and draw us away from what matters most. As a result, we may not be focusing on what we're reading, saying, seeing, hearing or doing as well as we should. This can be a real problem, especially when it's our children's wellbeing and safety that's at stake.

What's one thing you can do to cut down on the time you spend on the computer?

Food for Thought ...

Think back to this past weekend.

How **present** were you with your spouse or partner ... your children ... your friends?

Wisdom from the sages...

“ No matter what you’ve done for yourself or humanity, if you can’t look back on having given love and attention to your own family, what have you really accomplished? ”

Lee Iacocca

The statistics are sobering.

Kids ages 8 to 18 spend more than 7.5 hours a day using technology. Two-thirds of children under six live in homes where the television is on more than half the time. And nearly one-third of students aged 14-21 juggle five to eight different media while doing homework.³

The ability to focus is a learned skill, and more and more children aren't learning it. In fact, the cultural norms of today are actually working against our ability to maintain focus.

Here's what I mean:

Wherever you go these days, you see people talking on the phone while driving ... texting while sharing dinner with family or friends ... checking email in the middle of a movie.

With so much stimuli coming in, the brain simply can't focus on what's relevant or important.

Actions speak louder than words. How do your actions around technology impact your kids?

³ Lewin, Tamar. *If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online*. *The New York Times*. January 20, 2010.

⁴ Rideout, Victoria, Vandewater, Elizabeth, and Wartella, Ellen. *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers*. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. 2003.

⁵ AnyBody: *Parents are ignoring their children for their BlackBerry*. *The Washington Post*. January 31, 2011.

It's hard to have a meaningful conversation when we're always checking the screen. Or when we're saying, "Give me a minute while Daddy makes a quick phone call ... finishes this email ... watches the game ..." You fill in the blanks.

We've become a society so accustomed to letting virtual connections interrupt our day that we don't always see the person who is sitting right in front of us.

So what's the message we're sending to our kids? Is it that everyone and everything takes priority over their needs?

When you're not physically and emotionally available to your children, it can lead them to wonder, "Why don't my parents want to spend time with me?" This lack of real connection can lead to acting out by kids who have a hard time distinguishing between positive and negative attention.

It's not surprising that a recent study found that children often feel their parents pay less attention to them than to their smartphones.

Being able to look your child in the eye ... to tune into what's really happening in their lives. To reflect what they're thinking ... and to be totally present with them. Isn't that what matters most in parenting?

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Aristotle

It's tempting to blame technology, but that's not the answer. Technology has done a lot to enrich our lives. Besides, it's not going away.

What we need is to find a healthier way to live with the many tech and non-tech distractions of daily life. We need to create an oasis of attention where our kids don't come in a distance fifth after texts, email, Twitter and everything else.

I have a client whose child requested a tech-free period between 7 and 10 each night. No phones. No laptops. No TV. No electronics of any kind. Just family time.

The suggestion is simple and heartwarming. And it reinforced my belief that kids know and feel the vacuum that our lack of attention creates.

Recent trends underscore this truth.

Attention deficit syndrome (ADD) and hyperactive behavior among the young are growing problems in our fast-moving society. So are issues surrounding failing education, addiction, sex and sexuality, declining empathy, and an unraveling of family cohesiveness.

**How would
your family life
be different if
you instituted a
“tech-free” time
at home?**

How do we keep our kids from slipping through these and other cracks? How do we nurture their innate capacity to think and feel and bond deeply?

It's pretty clear, actually. As parents, we have to set a good example. For starters, it means paying attention and tuning into to our kids so that you can focus on the right thing, at the right time and in the right way.

Let's break it down to see how.

Food for Thought ...

The ability to **focus** is a **learned** skill.

What are you teaching **your** kids about paying **attention**?

Wisdom from the sages...

“ The most important thing in communication
is to hear what isn't being said. ”

Peter F. Drucker

Attunetion is where the path to better parenting begins

Effective communication isn't simply about talking. In fact, research shows that the majority of what we communicate is non-verbal. It's the emotion behind your child's words ... the look on your daughter's face ... the way your son holds his head ... what he does with his hands when he's nervous or upset ... all of these have powerful meaning.

That's why the first step in the Attunetion Approach is paying attention to the right thing — and that means learning to read your child's verbal and non-verbal cues and behaviors.

Let me share an example.

Jake comes home, hoody pulled down over his head. He grunts hello as he slips past you in the kitchen. Something catches your eye. Was that flash of metal you just saw a tongue ring? Or just the light reflecting off your son's jacket?

You turn down the stove and follow Jake to his room. As you do, you can feel your anger rising. After all, you've told him a thousand times, NO piercings.

Everyone has a look or a gesture they unconsciously display when they're upset.

List three for each member of your family, including yourself

But rather than exploding at Jake, you try something different. This time, you look beyond your feelings about body piercing and focus on the right thing: Figuring out why your son had a hole poked through his tongue.

After all, a tongue ring isn't necessarily a sign of trouble. Jake may simply be trying to express his individuality. But as you look at your son, you notice he's sullen ... not his usual outgoing self. On closer examination, you notice his jeans are baggier than usual. When did he lose so much weight?

By listening to Jake with your ears and eyes, and an open heart and mind, you can avoid jumping to conclusions or making a quick judgment. In other words, by paying Attunetion to the right thing, you can get a more accurate picture of what's really happening in Jake's life. And in doing so, you can demonstrate your care and concern in a way that's beneficial.

Here are a couple less extreme examples.

Let's say you're a new parent. Paying Attunetion to the right thing means tuning into your baby's cries so that you can tell if he is hungry, tired, needing a diaper change or wanting a cuddle.

Can you think of a time when you made an incorrect assumption about your child's behavior?

What was the outcome?

Let's say your child is now 3. Paying Attunetion to the right thing means tuning into your toddler's waning patience as he plays will help you know if your son needs quiet time, a snack or a change in activity.

And let's say that tiny baby is now 6 feet tall and 18. Paying Attunetion to the right thing means tuning into the right cues and behaviors will help you know if your teen is simply exploring his individuality, expressing hurt or anger, or falling into dangerous habits and behaviors.

Attunetion prompts you to take a closer look at what's happening with you child so that you can determine which things are most important, and which ones can be dealt with later, or maybe not at all.

That's what we mean when we say

Attunetion is paying attention and tuning in to the right thing.

Food for Thought ...

Tune in and take a **close** look at your children. Did you **notice** anything that **surprised** you?

Wisdom from the sages...

“ Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around. ”

Finding the right time to connect

You've probably heard it a million times, "timing is everything." When it comes to the Attunetion Approach and connecting with our kids, that phrase couldn't be truer.

That's because Attunetion means paying attention and focusing on the right thing ... at the right time.

For example, talking to your child about a poor report card as she walks through the front door may not be the best time to talk ... especially if dinner is on the stove ... the phone is ringing ... and you're racing for an appointment.

Better to set aside quiet, uninterrupted time to connect and communicate with your child. Time when you both can focus and truly listen to what each other has to say.

Respect is an important part of the equation. That's why the Attunetion Approach means focusing on the right thing ... at the right time ... and in the right way for you and your child.

First seek to understand, then to be understood.

Stephen R. Covey

Listen with your entire body — your eyes and ears — when your child comes to you. Stop what you’re doing, turn your entire body toward your child, and really listen.

If the phone rings, ignore it ... if the television is on, turn it off. Stop what you’re doing and pay Attunetion. Be completely there. Your child might need your undivided attention for only a few minutes, but those few minutes could make a world of difference in his life and in your relationship with him.

Every child is unique, with his or her own style of communicating. So what works for one of your children may not work for another. Observe your child. Learn to understand what makes your child “tick.” And then adapt your message to your child’s temperament and personality.

Tuning into to your two-year old having a temper tantrum involves not only responding with appropriate limits. It also means understanding what the emotional meaning of the outburst might be. Is your child tired? Angry? Hurt? Each requires a different response.

Think about the last “real” conversation you had with your child.

If your child had to assign a grade for your listening skills, what would he or she give you?

Be aware of your own body language as well. Are your verbal and non-verbal communications saying the same thing? Children can sense your interest in and approval of them.

Be a mirror for their needs. Reflect with empathy what you notice your child feeling and what you hear her saying. When children feel responded to and understood, they develop confidence and positive self-esteem.

That's why the Attunetion Approach is so powerful. Because when you can focus on the right thing ... at the right time ... and in the right way, the Attunetion Approach can help you parent with greater ease, confidence and love – even in today's distracted world.

How do you show your children that you value your connection?

What, if anything, could you do to strengthen that bond?

Food for Thought ...

What do you do to **show** your **child** that you're **actively** listening?

Wisdom from the sages...

“ Don't worry that children never listen to you;
worry that they are always watching you. ”

Robert Fulghum

What's stopping you from paying Attunetion?

Behavioral science has done a great job in helping us to crack the mystery of what makes a child succeed in life. Among the various elements of parenting they've studied, one has emerged as a major player in the story and that's responsiveness — in other words, how well you pay Attunetion to your children and their needs.

It makes sense. Children whose parents pay attention and tune into the right thing at the right time and in the right way sense that they matter. And as a result, then tend to have higher self-esteem, get along better with their peers, are good at resolving conflicts and adjust better to school than children who are not given the same level of healthy attention.

Where do you start?

The great thing about the Attunetion Approach is that it gets easier with practice. Make one small shift in how you tune into your kids and then keep going. Learn from your mistakes. Be patient and, one day, paying Attunetion will be as natural as breathing.

Name one thing you can do today to pay better Attunetion.

Where to begin?

- Start listening to your kids, even though they probably won't notice at first that you're listening.
- Stop hurrying and let your child finish her sentences, no matter how long or windy they may be.
- Give your son the opportunity to express himself without jumping in to correct him. Your presence as an active and loving listener is powerful stuff that can add confidence to your child's life.
- Avoid "yes/no" questions. Instead, encourage your children to talk more about things by asking open-ended questions. They can prompt discussion and open the door to new connections and deeper relationships.
- Like the daughter of my client, try establishing a tech-free zone – a few hours each day when everyone puts aside the gadgets and gizmos and actually hang together as a family.

When it comes to parenting, there's no better way to lead than by example. Because when we pay attention to the right thing at the right time and in the right way, it can inspire others to do the same. That's the power of Attunetion.

Now list three additional things that you can do tomorrow.

To Learn More about the Attunetion Approach and how it can help you parent with greater love, comfort and ease, go to www.attunetion.com.