



Positive Reinforcement Through Rewards

Some children need more than recognition and praise. Rewards can be effective in middle childhood, especially once you have clearly defined the specific, positive behavior goals you expect. Here are some effective strategies:

- Make or devise a chart that specifies the desired behavior, as well as the time of day or the situation in which it should be demonstrated. The calendar should cover an entire week or, for some behavior, a longer period. It should allow the activity or goal to be rated each day. Decide how many points an incidence of positive behavior will earn. In a summary column, total up the points. (Tokens, such as paper stars pasted on the calendar, tend to work better for early school-age children; points and contract systems work better for older children.) Small rewards may be given for a predetermined amount of points at the end of each day or week, with larger rewards reserved for a longer period of time or a greater number of points. Keep this behavior chart in a conspicuous place so it can serve as a source of positive reinforcement and pride.
- Make a list of the rewards your child will receive for a particular number of points. Rewards should be meaningful to your child, and she should participate actively in their selection. Be very clear about how many points or days or weeks of changed behavior it takes to earn a reward.
- It is important to keep close daily track of your child's progress. Keep her enthusiasm level high by reinforcing behavior as frequently as possible.
- Keep in mind that the chart should be used as a measure of success. Avoid penalties and demerits that are humiliating, or that discourage your child from even trying. Use other forms of mild punishment, such as timeouts.

Gradually, this program can be phased out as children internalize their behavior. At that time, children usually lose interest or forget to ask for their points.

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